

Cancer experience triggers thoughts of healthy lifestyle changes in survivors and their families

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After studying cancer survivors and their family caregivers, researchers at Case Western Reserve University conclude that the period between the final cancer treatment and first post-treatment checkup may be an ideal time for the entire household to jumpstart a healthy lifestyle.

"A window of opportunity exists during the post-treatment transition period for oncology clinicians to reach out to patients and their caregivers who want to have a healthy start on life after [cancer](#)," said Susan Mazanec, PhD, RN, AOCN, assistant professor at Case Western Reserve's Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing.

Mazanec, also a nurse scientist at University Hospitals Case Medical Center's Seidman Cancer Center, was lead investigator of the study, "Health Behaviors in Family Members of Patients Completing Cancer Treatment," recently reported in *Oncology Nursing Forum*.

Mazanec and colleagues surveyed and interviewed 50 patients diagnosed with breast, colorectal, head and neck, lung or prostate cancers and 38 caregivers within three week of a patient's last treatment. The questions were designed to gauge family members' intention, perceived benefit and confidence about eating a healthy diet, [physical activity](#) and smoking cessation.

"These are initial steps in changing behavior," she said.

Family members expressed strong intentions to engage in health-promoting behaviors related to nutrition and physical activity, but also reported high levels of emotional distress. The most common health-related goals identified by patients at the completion of treatment were related to physical activity and nutrition.

As a result, Mazanec is testing new interventions to help survivors and [family members](#) engage in physical activity together and support each other's efforts in behavior change. Caregivers are encouraged to seek community resources that help them deal with the mental and physical strains of caring for a family member with cancer.

The time between final treatment and first follow-up—when a person transitions from active-treatment to post-treatment survivorship—often brings back the rush of emotions that surface within weeks of diagnosis, she said. But the period also offers a chance to look toward the future.

"Cancer is a family affair that may offer an opportunity to teach people about good [health behaviors](#)," Mazanec said.

Provided by Case Western Reserve University

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