Cancer Wellness Program

At the Helen G. Nassif Community Cancer Center of Iowa, we understand that each cancer survivor is unique, with their own combination of cancer type, treatments, medical history and challenges. Our Cancer Wellness Program addresses this by working with each patient to develop an individual wellness plan. Our specially trained staff recognizes you as an active partner in your healthcare and are ready to work with you to set goals and provide support in leading a healthy life.

An open relationship between your Cancer Wellness and healthcare teams is essential. Communication is key to offering you a comprehensive program that helps you get the most from your treatment and adjust to life as a survivor. We work with you to decide how to best communicate your progress to your healthcare team.

We encourage cancer patients who are newly diagnosed, currently undergoing treatment or several years out from treatment to use our programs. Our Cancer Wellness Program looks at the whole person, while focusing on the cancer experience and it’s impact on the entire family.

If you have any questions or would like more information on our wellness services contact your Cancer Care Coordinator at 319/369-7116.

Cancer Care Coordinator  

What does your Cancer Care Coordinator do for you?

- Serve as a point of contact for you, your family, and friends
- Facilitate coordination and timeliness of your care—ensuring the right place, right time, and right team members
- Communicate with all team members involved with your care, including physicians
- Provide education, insight, and support as to how cancer affects your life. This allows you to prepare for changing needs and the possible impact on your physical and emotional states
- Identify your needs and connect you with the appropriate services

We recognize that a diagnosis of cancer is a life changing event. Our goal is to provide education, support, and resources for you and your family during this journey.
My Support Team

Your Support Team seeks to meet the needs of the whole person – physical, social, emotional, and spiritual. The team also helps to reduce stress, improve well-being, and support the healing process through the coordination of treatment, survivorship and wellness. Any member of your Support Team can be reached by calling 319/558-4876.

**Oncology Certified Social Worker**

As a licensed counselor she is here to provide support for you, your family, and loved ones. This includes coping with a cancer diagnosis, treatment and survivorship; caregiver stress; helping children/teens better understand cancer; community resources and financial issues.

**Cancer Exercise Specialist**

Assists you with maintaining and regaining strength, stability and overall physical wellness. Individualized plans are developed according to your current health needs and your current treatment plan. Sessions can be one-on-one or small group settings.

**Cancer Risk Assessment Counselor**

An Advanced Registered Nurse Practitioner specializing in cancer and genetics provides you and your family with cancer risk assessment screening, genetic counseling and testing, and will help you and your support team understand the medical and psychological issues of having an inherited cancer. You will also be educated on how genetic cancers affect the rest of your family.

**Oncology Certified Dietitian**

Available to assess your nutritional status and to design a nutrition plan to meet your needs. She offers counseling and support to help reduce side effects, and provide information on developing and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

**Chaplain**

Available to offer spiritual support to you and your family. Assesses faith related concerns such as loss of hope, loss of meaning in life, and feeling disconnected.
Certified Sex Therapist/Body Image Specialist

A certified counselor is available to meet with you regarding body image or sexuality concerns. She will help you address feelings about your body and changes that may have occurred, improving communication with your partner, and to explore your need for lifelong emotional connections to others.

Psychologist

Our psychologists are available to assist you and your family to work through the challenges that can come from a cancer diagnosis. These challenges can have a significant effect on everyone involved. A referral can be made by your Cancer Care Coordinator or your Oncology Certified Social Worker.

Our team includes several additional members such as massage therapists and certified Reiki and Reflexology professionals.

Cancer Wellness Program

Jane Borg Cook of Cedar Rapids lost her battle with breast cancer in 2008. In her memory, her family—Rob, Jennifer, Katy and Robbie—provided the lead gift for the Cancer Wellness Program. The program is free for cancer patients and helps improve their quality of life through physical, nutritional and psychosocial support.

“Mom always believed that the best medicine was to be active physically, mentally and emotionally,” said Jennifer.
Integrative Wellness

Holistic or integrative approaches to care focus on how the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual elements of a person are interconnected to improve and maintain health. Holistic approaches focus on the whole person rather than just on treating the disease.

The Helen G. Nassif Community Cancer Center encourages the use of these holistic approaches as complimentary to your treatment plan. We work closely with all of your providers to assure that these offerings support your treatment plan—ultimately improving your quality of life.

We recognize that your cancer experience impacts your family and friends—your support team. We encourage everyone on your support team to utilize the services of the Community Cancer Center. Their quality of life is very important to your care experience.

**Massage Therapy**—more than just relaxation and stress relief; it can actually improve your health. Our certified massage therapists can help alleviate some of the side effects of cancer and its treatment such as pain and lymphedema.

**Reiki**—a technique for reducing stress and promoting healing. The practitioner’s hands are lightly positioned in areas on or near your clothed body. There is no massage of manipulation of tissue during Reiki. People that use Reiki indicate it reduces stress, improves sleep and appetite, decreases the need for pain medication and accelerates the healing process. It may also reduce the unwanted side effects of radiation and drugs, including chemotherapy.

**Reflexology**—Reflexology is the application of pressure to areas on the feet, hands or ears. By targeting different zones of the feet, deep relaxation and improved circulation may be noted in different zones and reflex areas throughout the body. Several studies funded by the National Cancer Institute and the National Institutes of Health indicate that reflexology may reduce pain, anxiety and depression while enhancing sleep and relaxation. Studies also show that reflexology may have benefits in palliative care of people with cancer.

**Meditation**—a mental exercise that helps you find relaxation, inner peace, creativity and inspiration as well as emotional and physical balance. It is not a part of any religion. It is a precise technique for resting the mind and attaining a state of consciousness that is totally different from the normal waking state. When you meditate, you are fully awake and alert, but your mind is not focused on the external world or on the events taking place around you. Meditation requires an inner state that is still and one-pointed so that the mind becomes silent. Once you learn the technique it can be done anywhere and anytime.
Anusara Yoga—a form of exercise that helps you develop better posture and breathing techniques through supported stretches of the body. It systematically works the entire body building foundational strength. Yoga is a physical exercise that also helps reduce stress and create inner peace.

Zumba—features fast and slow rhythms set to high-energy Latin and international music. The upbeat music allows participants to burn calories while improving balance and coordination. Before participants know it, they are getting fit by dancing their worries away.

Tai Chi—a system of linked elegant movements based off martial arts and old Chinese exercises. It has been practiced for centuries to help with tension and stress. The slow movements allow participants to reach inner and outer peace while improving balance and body awareness.

Pilates—a combination of exercises that engages your mind and body. It is a blend of strength, cardiovascular and flexibility training. Pilates takes a balanced approach so that your body works as efficiently as possible in both exercise and daily life.

The Community Cancer Center consistently offers new programs and services that are beneficial to you, your family, and friends. Periodically, different programs such as Music Therapy, Art Therapy, Cooking Demonstrations, or Mind-Body Skills groups are offered to support the physical and emotional needs of you and your family and friends.

Many of these services are provided at no charge through Helen G. Nassif Community Cancer Care of Iowa. Some are provided for a small fee and some may be covered by insurance.

Please visit communitycancercenter.org to view class schedules and sign up for our monthly newsletter. For more information, you can also contact your Cancer Care Coordinator at 319/558-4876.
Sexuality and Sexual Health

Like many patients, when you first learned you had cancer, your first thoughts were probably of survival. Eventually other concerns arise about how cancer affects your day-to-day living and your overall quality of life. Research shows half of all cancer patients will experience sexual side effects from treatments. Side effects may impact your physical and emotional well-being as well as your relationship with your partner. This is true whether you are male or female, 20 or 80 years-old, single or in a relationship.

An overall loss of desire is the most common sexual change for both men and women. The most common side effect for men is erectile dysfunction. Women often note vaginal dryness and pain with sexual activity. Other side effects (such as fatigue, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, constipation, hair loss, weight changes, scars, and smell or skin sensitivities) may all impact your body image, sexuality and intimacy besides leaving you feeling simply exhausted.

Sex and sexuality are important parts of your well-being and impact your quality of life. Feelings about sexuality affect your zest for living, your self-image and your relationships with the people you care about most. Research shows that healthy sexual expression can relieve stress and anxiety, foster hope, accentuate spirituality and distract patients from the emotional and physical effects of cancer and its treatment.

Ways to Get Help

• Sexual health is a sensitive topic. Discuss sexual side-effects with your healthcare providers the same as you would any other side effect.

• Resources are available to help you and your partner. Nassif Community Cancer Center Care Coordinators and Social Workers are available to meet with you any time before, during or after your treatment to help address sexuality, intimacy and body image.

• Nassif Community Cancer Center also has a therapist available to meet with you and/or you and your partner. This therapist is a licensed therapist as well as a certified sex therapist who can help you address issues of low libido, sexual fatigue, body image and intimacy.
Wellness & Quality of Life

Exercise Program

The exercise portion of the Cancer Wellness Program includes:

• Individualized Programs
• Group Classes
• Open Gym

Our specially trained staff evaluates each person entering the program and develops an individualized exercise plan for them. Together, you and our Exercise Specialist identify exercise goals based on your unique needs and limitations. As you go through the different stages of treatment and survivorship, these needs will change and we will be here to help modify your exercise accordingly.

We will work on a combination of different exercises including:

• Cardiovascular Conditioning
• Strength Training
• Stretching Techniques
• Balance and Mobility

Our staff encourages you to exercise independently by teaching you how to safely use all types of exercise equipment. Exercise knowledge encourages and empowers cancer survivors to become physically active at diagnosis, during and after treatment, and to remain active throughout life.

We want you to feel comfortable exercising on your own, but you should also know that there are great benefits from exercising in group classes. In a group, you are: led by a knowledgeable instructor, surrounded by other survivors in a fun environment, and able to follow a consistent schedule. It allows you to work at your own pace, yet still be motivated by those around you. It is also a great chance to meet others who are going through (or have gone through) some of the same situations as you are.

What to bring:

• Comfortable walking shoes
• Comfortable, loose fitting clothes
• Filled water bottle
• Current medication list
• Lymphedema sleeve (if prescribed)
Wellness & Quality of Life

Exercise & Cancer Patients

Congratulations on your commitment to be active throughout your cancer journey. You have taken a very important step.

The connection between exercise and improved physical and mental health is well established.

The benefits associated with exercise for people with cancer include:
• Decreased treatment-related symptoms
• Improved physical and mental well-being

Cancer-related fatigue is the most common and distressing side effect reported by cancer patients. It can be the result of one or several factors including the cancer itself, stress, or treatment side effects. Cancer-related fatigue is often described as a tiredness or lack of energy that does not go away with rest.

One of the greatest benefits of exercise is its ability to lessen the effects of cancer-related fatigue and maintain or enhance a patient’s quality of life.

Research shows regular exercise improves:
• Mood
• Balance
• Body Image
• Mobility
• Strength
• Self-Concept
• Sleep Patterns
• Cardiovascular Health

Exercise can decrease:
• Anxiety
• Depression
• Tension
• Feelings of helplessness
• Anger

Research has also shown patients who exercise have a significantly better quality of life than patients who do not exercise.

Exercise Tips

Check with your physician
Before starting an exercise program check with your physician to make sure you are prepared to start exercising.

Set short and long-term goals
Choose exercises that will help you reach your goals, improve your health and are suitable for your fitness level.

National recommendations
It is recommended everyone perform 30 minutes of cardiovascular exercise five days per week and some form of strength training two times per week. Not everyone is the same, especially during treatment. Work with your Cancer Exercise Specialist to design a plan that fits you.

Increase exercises slowly
You can increase resistance, repetitions or time about 10% per week. Increasing more can lead to injury or burn-out.

Keep an exercise log or journal
Journals help you stay organized and track your improvement to reach your goals.
Maintaining Nutritional Health

Eating the right kinds of foods before, during and after your treatment can help you feel better and stay stronger.

**A healthy diet is very important for:**

- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Selecting and eating healthy foods that supply your body with fuel and nutrients for repair and healing
- Helping prevent recurrence of the cancer or the development of a new tumor

Coping with changes in your eating habits may seem overwhelming. A dietitian, specially trained to help cancer patients maintain nutritional balance, is available to you through the Cook Cancer Wellness Program. Your dietitian meets with you for a private consultation or during chemotherapy. They can provide guidance regarding food choices and develop an individualized nutrition plan that meets your unique goals.

The combination of regular physical activity and a healthy diet is likely to provide more health benefits than either behavior alone.

**If your appetite is good:**

- Select low-fat meats such as fish and poultry in place of higher fat meats
- Choose whole grains such as oatmeal, whole wheat bread, and brown rice
- Eat a wide variety of fruits and vegetables in your diet, especially ones that are deep or bright in color such as berries, citrus, apples, carrots, sweet potatoes, broccoli, bell peppers and leafy greens
- Include low-fat dairy products like milk and yogurt at meals or snacks
- Get plenty of fiber by including dry beans, fruits, vegetables and nuts in your diet
- Choose healthy fats such as olive or canola oil for cooking in place of butter or shortening
Nutrition Support

Healthy eating means including a variety of nutritious foods in your diet every day. Choose My Plate is a visual guide that can help you to plan well-balanced meals. Good nutrition may help improve your response and tolerance to treatment, decrease your risk of developing a future cancer, and help you to feel better.

Should I meet with a dietitian?

Ask yourself the following questions:

• Have you recently had a change in your weight of ten pounds or more?
• Have you been eating poorly because of a poor appetite for more than two weeks?
• Do you have a nutrition concern (dry mouth, no appetite, foods taste funny, nausea) that you would like to talk to a dietitian about?
• Are you interested in learning more about how the foods you eat affect your body during cancer treatment?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you could benefit from a consultation with our dietitian.