Supporting a Cancer Fighter

A simple guide to help friends and family support cancer fighters

Jim Ladwig
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By Jim Ladwig

Jim became Marketing Director at Haelan Products Inc. in February 2019. During his own battle with cancer he started taking Haelan 951. After seeing such amazing results, he developed a passion for natural ways to heal the body. He is a certified health coach and is fully embracing the Haelan Products mission of helping individuals and families experience the joy that comes from restored health.

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Introduction

It had been about eight months of doctor visit after doctor visit and test after test. Several times I was sent home and told that it’s just Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) and I needed to take this or that pill to help manage it. But I knew that something else was going on. I had felt ill before but never this long and not in this way. There was something going on in my body that was unlike anything I had experienced before, and I was determined to figure it out.

We were in the middle of a move across town with a new baby and a first grader in tow. I must admit; I was not much help during this major life transition. I can understand my family’s frustration; I had always been the one to make things happen and get the important jobs done. So, many of the things that I would usually take on were getting missed. Finally, after unloading the final boxes I turned to my wife and said, "I'm going to try one more time and go see another doctor." This time it was a local Nurse Practitioner in our new small town just outside of Nashville, TN.

When I described all that was going on, she had a very puzzled look. She just kept reviewing the details with me. She was the first one I felt really listened to me. At last I felt I was being heard. But, then the consensus...
more tests! After getting back some of the results we saw no indications as to what was going on but there was still another one left to do. I was getting pretty tired of being poked and prodded but needed to see it though. About a week later the results were in. I had been diagnosed with a cancerous mass that was causing all types of issues with my digestion.

I felt like an, "I told you so," was in order. However, as much as this diagnosis affected me, it also seemed to affect my family just as much. There was so much going on in our lives... We had a baby, a new house, and I was only 34 years old. What terrible timing. As if there was a good time for something like this... I had never experienced so many emotions all at once.

Fast forward and I am sitting with my wife in my doctor’s exam room recalling all that has happened over the last few years. We discussed the major lifestyle changes, diet changes and environmental changes that I have made along with the amazing support from my family and friends throughout this journey. As we wrapped up, I asked my doctor "so, when do I need to see you again?" I will never forget the look of relief on my wife's face as he said, "I believe we're done. Everything is looking great and we don't need to do anymore follow up."
Since my diagnosis I have made some major changes and set out to help those going through similar challenges. It was quite a journey, with many ups and downs. In this book I will share some of the things that we have learned along the way. Things that my family and I would have benefited from knowing earlier on in this process. I pray you find it helpful when supporting your cancer fighter.
Chapter 1

The News

Whether you are a cancer conqueror, cancer fighter, friend or loved one, we all know that there is a fear that surrounds the word "cancer." Even though the survival rate has dramatically improved since the 90s, the statistics are still not great, depending on the type of cancer that you are talking about the average survival rate after 5 years is approximately 70%.

Getting the news that I had cancer filled me with a mix of emotions and feelings. There is trauma that begins to set in the moment it is even spoken. Thoughts like "they must have me mixed up with someone else" "this can’t be happening" "I am going to beat this!" "this will be tough" "what will my family do?" and the big one "what now?" With all these emotions and thoughts after a diagnosis, sometimes the best support you can offer is to just listen.

One of the things that surprised me the most was how fast I was rushed to the next thing. The next test, the next procedure, the next doctor visit and so on. The most comforting times I had was when people just listened. I am not one to talk much about my struggles, so opening up about these things took time. Plus, on
top of that my energy was super low. Things just needed to move at a different pace.

When you are supporting a cancer fighter it can be hard to fight back the urge to offer every bit of advice or encouragement you can muster up. However, sometimes just listening and calmly talking things through can be really helpful to keep your loved one motivated to fight and lower stress levels. I actually found that many well-intentioned friends were more stressed about it than I was. Lowering these stressful interactions can really help begin the healing process.

Working with cancerfighters, I am in a unique position to listen to their story. Many have shared how thankful they are for our conversation as it can be hard to talk to their friends and family. Worry and fear have a way of leaking out during vulnerable moments. When supporting your cancer fighter, let them know that you are concerned and truly care, but be mindful not to add additional stress and anxiety to a vulnerable moment.
Table Talk

“I fix what's broken - except in the heart.”
- Bernard Malamud

In life we all have a completely unique journey. That seems like a pretty obvious statement. But at times even the best listener can start to listen through the lens of their own story. We all have experiences or at least have heard stories about someone's fight against cancer. It can be easy to superimpose those experiences onto someone telling you their story. When supporting a cancer fighter, try to listen with fresh ears. Every story is different, every journey has different twists and turns. Make a point to listen to understand what they are going through. This will help you to best support them.

For example, maybe you have known a cancer fighter that dealt with depression. This may skew how you hear someone else's story. You may be looking for signs of depression and miss another important detail. Now, I am not saying to throw out all of your past learning and experience, I am just saying to be intentional in starting fresh and listening to each unique journey. You may just find exactly the best way you can support that person.
Another thing to keep in mind is “fixing” is not always fixing. During my journey I have to admit that it was not always helpful when my friends tried to “fix.” What does that mean? Well, during this process I learned there were a few habits that I would need to change. Knowing when to offer these suggestions to someone and knowing when a person is ready to hear these suggestions is kind of tricky. It takes time to adjust to a new lifestyle and we all adjust at our own pace. Be patient and wait for the right moments to offer suggestions.

I heard a great line the other day about counseling verses coaching. Counseling looks to fix the past coaching looks to better the future. Now, I am not sure that anything is that black and white, but there is a great take away from this statement. We can be coaches, offering encouragement and resources to help your fighter stay strong and ready for battle. When you are sitting at the dinner table and your fighter is not feeling up to the fight, let them know that you are in their corner.

“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”
- Lao Tzu
Detoxing Life

Did you know that there are many examples of detox in nature? Rain will detoxify air, the ocean is filled with oil-eating bacteria, the sun helps clean surface water, and even a forest fire is nature’s way of cleansing the underbrush and sprouting new life. But, as we all know, at times man needs to step in and help with the process. The same holds true for our bodies. We are all constantly exposed to toxins on a daily basis. From the food we eat to the friends we keep. Toxins come in all shapes and sizes and sometimes we need to step in and help detox our lives.

One of the things your cancer fighter will be addressing is their immune system. It plays a vital role in the healing process. A strong immune system will help to fight back the cancer cells and keep the body stable during treatment. Another important thing to consider is taking as much stress off of your immune system as possible by reducing what is called the "toxic load." Our bodies are capable of managing various toxins at reasonable levels and they do this pretty effectively when we are healthy. However, when addressing degenerative diseases, we can help our immune system by reducing this toxic load.
So how can you help your cancer fighter with this information?

Let’s start with food. Eating organic food can be a bit more expensive but the benefits are worth it. If you are preparing a meal to help out or offering to help with their groceries, consider going organic. This will help reduce their toxic load and take stress off of their immune system. If budget is a concern, take a look at the Environmental Working Group's “Clean 15” and “Dirty Dozen”. This can help when deciding what foods are more important to get organic.

Another thing to consider is water. I prefer a clean spring water. Dirty water will add unwanted toxins. Take a look at your city's tap water rating to learn more about your local area.

Poor air quality can be another toxin to cut out. Getting a good air purifier and fresh outdoor air can be really healing. Depending on where you live, this can be as easy as opening up the windows or getting outside. Indoor air quality has become much more important in recent years as many of us are spending the majority of our time inside. You can help by changing in home filters, adding a purifier, or getting a plant like the Spider Plant. These plants are easy to take care of and clean the air.
Next is emotions. As we discussed in a previous chapter, there can be many emotions that are coming up. They may come and go at random times. It is important to have someone to talk to who will just listen and encourage. Getting these feelings out rather than bottling them up can be really helpful.

Finally, spiritual detox. This can mean something different to everyone. The key takeaway is to help your fighter have healthy spiritual relationships.

As you can see it is important to not add any additional toxins to your fighter’s load and begin to remove as many of the toxins as you can. This will be a valuable support to your loved one.
Practical and Consistent

It can be easy to offer support in the beginning when things are fresh on your mind and everyone is processing the situation. However, consistent support will be much appreciated and can really help to boost the spirits of your loved one. Here are a few practical things to consider offering.

**Meal Prep:** Preparing meals is time consuming and can require a lot of attention. If you offer to help with meals, be sure to make sure you ask about any dietary restrictions, food allergies, or food sensitivities. Like I mentioned before, try to go organic as much as possible. Good, clean food is an important part of healing.

**Babysitting:** This can be a fun thing to offer. Kids are wonderful and I love being with my kids. But as all parents know, getting some alone time or a date night can be really healing. If your fighter is a parent, offer to take the kids for the afternoon or set up a fun date night.

**Gifts:** We all have our own love languages and some people love gifts. Giving the right type of gift during this time can be hard to figure out. Just keep in
mind that our favorite foods may not be as healing as we want them to be. Try to think of gifts that do not add to the toxic load, but rather take away from it like the plant I mentioned in the last chapter.

**House Cleaning:** Sometimes simple tasks like laundry and cleaning can seem like climbing Mount Everest when you are fighting a degenerative disease. Try offering to help with these tasks. This is another way to reduce the toxic load. A clean home is not only physically and mentally healthier, but you can incorporate natural cleaning products when cleaning things like surfaces, dishes and laundry. There are many great natural products available.

I'm sure you can think of a few other things to add to this list. The key is to see it through. Sometimes things can get more challenging before they get better. Stick by your fighter through the whole journey. Set reminders on your calendar or on your phone to check in and offer support. Being there through the entire fight will mean a lot in the long run.
Chapter 5

The Power of Positivity

If you have never read a book, social media post or seen a TV show on the power of positive thinking, then you may be living under a rock. There is a reason this concept is so popular. Because, it produces results. Now, I'm not saying that thinking positive thoughts will make you a millionaire or improve the growth of your prized petunias but there are some amazing health benefits to a positive mindset.

Studies have shown that negativity can be harmful to your health. I have read that people who view themselves as sick will have a harder time healing than those who change and view themselves as getting healthier. It is easy to start to view an illness as a part of who we are. But the truth is, it doesn't need to define us. This can be hard to hear at first. Having an illness can get us special attention and we often get to tell our story and share about our struggles. Keep in mind I am writing to you as a cancer fighter myself. We all battle these things. But the fact is, a slight shift in mindset can go a long way.

So, what does this mean when helping your cancer fighter? Well it can be summed up like this. Rejoice in every victory and plan for a bright future. Getting
excited about even the smallest victory is encouraging. A good blood test, improved energy, eating a full meal, these can all be great victories. Shifting the focus on what we can do rather than what we can't is important. Instead of feeling defeated, help your fighter feel strong and victorious. This will carry them through a challenging time.

When I was at my worst it was easy to stop making long-term plans for life. I rarely thought about what I would be doing after I was better. It took great supporters to keep me planning. Planning something to look forward to is key. Start thinking big. This struggle can forever change their life and be a great motivator to take on a new life purpose. It did in my case.

One last thing on the power of positive thinking is to help others stay positive as well. This may mean that you pull someone aside to share with them how their words can impact the health of your loved one. Your fighter may not have the strength or will to bring this up, but you can step in and help detox their environment.
Chapter 6

Leave This to The Pros

With the power of the internet at our fingertips, answers are pretty easy to come by. This doesn’t always mean that they are the right answers. Things like diet, supplements and treatments are best left to the professionals who regularly deal with these diseases. Now, I say this also understanding that there are all types of different professionals. Some may decide to take a traditional approach to their fight and others an integrative or even a holistic. The great thing is that there are professionals for all of these approaches.

I believe that we should all endeavor to learn about our bodies and how to best take care of them. Proper diet, exercise and lifestyle are things we should be aware of and as a supporter, you may have suggestions for your fighter. Before acting on these suggestions it would be good to have them ask their provider if this is a good idea. There are many things that factor into treatment.

If you find a great product or diet, this could be just what they need to help them in their recovery. But, make sure that this will not interfere with anything their provider has prescribed. Many treatment
regimens require specific diets, and accidentally leading a patient off that path can adversely affect treatment outcomes.

Bottom line: Leave the diagnosis, treatment and prescribing to the pros.
Okay, so you are past the treatment and we are in the clear... right? Well, not exactly. This is a crucial time to continue supporting your cancer fighter. There are many things that happen to the body during treatment and many treatment side effects can be quite challenging. I remember just trying to figure out foods that I could tolerate eating. It was pretty frustrating. From lack of energy to the trauma that is still hanging around, there are many things a good support network can help with at this stage.

Many treatments will leave the body in a pretty rough state. It can develop new food sensitivities and intolerances, strange pains and hair loss. These are all very frustrating and can zap the energy right out of your fighter. Keep checking in and following up. They need your positive encouragement.

Once these things start fading away, this experience can become just a memory. But that does not mean that the work is over. It is important to maintain an anti-cancer lifestyle. All the things we talked about in this book, like detoxing, clean eating and positive thinking, will become a new lifestyle. Help your fighter to maintain this lifestyle. Go on walks, eat a healthy
meal together, set goals and cultivate a stress-free lifestyle.

When you support a cancer fighter through their fight, you may be surprised at how many improvements you make to your own life.
A Few Final Thoughts

If you have just found out that you or your loved one has been diagnosed with cancer my heart goes out to you. There is no one size fits all way to support a cancer fighter. Everyone reacts in their own way. I don’t presume to know what each of you are going through and I wouldn’t dare to say I understand. Every journey is different. But what I can say is that the roll of friends and family played a major part in my recovery. From the occasional drop by of a friend, to the continued support of my wife and immediate family, each positive encounter helped me in my healing process.

Never underestimate the power of a kind word or an act of service. The worst thing we can do is to let someone go through this alone. We are stronger together.

Thank you for taking the time to support a cancer fighter. I hope you found this information helpful and I pray that however you support your cancer fighter, they feel encouraged and healing comes.
Thank you for reading.