

AWARe!

Should COVID-19 Put Your Screening and Treatment Plans on Hold?



“Fear of contracting the coronavirus in health care settings has dissuaded people from screening, diagnosis, and treatment,” Norman E. Sharpless, MD, director of the National Cancer Institute, wrote in Science magazine. “In general, the earlier one receives cancer treatment, the better the results. Cancers being missed now will still come to light eventually, but at a later stage and with worse prognoses.”

If you are concerned about cancer screening and treatment amid the pandemic, you may be asking yourself:

- Should I still get my scheduled cancer screenings?
- Is it safe to delay cancer screenings?
- Is it worth the risk to go to a facility for a screening?
- Should I put off my cancer treatment?
- How should I decide whether to get screened?

Experts agree: Don't put off cancer screenings.

With the coronavirus pandemic making people stay home and put off any non-urgent appointments, fewer people are getting preventive cancer screenings, which means many people who have cancer won't be diagnosed and won't be able to start treatment at the earliest possible stage.

When the pandemic first hit the U.S. in March and April, new cancer diagnoses dropped 46% for six types of cancer — breast, colorectal, lung, gastric, pancreatic, and esophageal — according to Quest Diagnostics. Unfortunately, that decline wasn't due to fewer cancer cases, but rather to people avoiding cancer screenings or ignoring symptoms that could be related to cancer.

According to data compiled by the Epic Health Research Network on screenings at

more than 300 hospitals, screenings for cervical, colon, and breast cancers dropped as much as 94% from the beginning of the pandemic through May. By June the numbers had recovered somewhat, but the number of screenings was still 29%-36% lower than in previous years.

In addition, many people are delaying cancer treatment or medical procedures that have been deemed non-urgent or “elective.” According to Dr. Sharpless, these delays in diagnosis and treatment could lead to an additional 10,000 deaths from breast and colorectal cancers (two cancer types that make up one sixth of all cancer deaths, and for which screenings are especially effective) over the next 10 years.

The Leever Cancer Center Provides Safe Cancer Care Amid COVID-19

You can rest assured that we are taking every precaution to ensure

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the safety of our staff and patients. Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have put a number of new procedures in place that are designed not only to minimize the possibility of infection, but to reassure our patients that seeking the care they need will not endanger their health.

One recent visitor to the Leever Cancer Center, Kim Millia, whose primary care doctor recommended that she see her provider for further testing after a blood transfusion, immediately noticed all the new precautionary measures.

“I knew the safest place to go would be a place that already has to be completely clean and sanitary because of patients with suppressed immune systems,” said Millia. “I just assumed that every precaution necessary would

be taken because of the clientele they are working with.”

Her expectations were realized when she visited the Leever Cancer Center. She was met by a greeter who took her temperature, made sure she was wearing a mask, and provided hand sanitizer. While she waited, she noticed that many of the waiting room chairs had been blocked off to promote social distancing, and maintenance workers were regularly disinfecting high-traffic surfaces.

At a time when there is so much uncertainty and fear, **the Leever Cancer Center is dedicated to providing an oasis of calm and safety** to ensure that needed cancer care is not delayed.

At a time when there is so much uncertainty and fear, the Leever Cancer Center is dedicated to providing an oasis of calm and safety to ensure that needed cancer care is not delayed. “Everything was extremely well taken care of,” said Kim. “I felt very comfortable and confident.”

For more information on health and safety at the Leever Cancer Center, go to our website, leevercancercenter.org and click on the red “Patient Health & Safety Alerts” banner.

7 Things to Consider Before You Decide Whether to Get Screened

Many people are still reluctant to get cancer screenings or treatment, but experts suggest you consider several factors before making a decision.

The opinion of your medical provider. Your medical provider can help you weigh the risks and benefits of getting a cancer screening or undergoing treatment and identify the solution that is best for you.

Your overall health. If you are generally healthy and have no high-risk medical conditions, such as diabetes, hypertension, obesity, heart disease, asthma, or a weakened immune system, you have less reason to avoid cancer screenings.

If you're experiencing symptoms. Screenings are important even if you have no signs of cancer, but if you have noticed anything suspicious (a lump in the breast, blood in the stool, a new or changing growth or lump on the skin, etc.), you should contact your provider immediately.

Your personal and family history. If you or your family members have had cancer you could be at a higher risk, which makes screenings even more important.

Your last screening. Your provider may give you the OK to delay your screening if you are only a few weeks past your next recommended screening date, but if you have never had a screening or are long past due, it's better not to wait.

COVID-19 infection rates in your area. In states with high rates of infection, it might make sense to wait until those levels go down before scheduling a screening. If you are in mandatory quarantine due to exposure to COVID-19 or travel to an area with high infection rates, wait until your quarantine period is over before scheduling a screening.

The safety practices of the facility where your screening or treatment will take place. Most hospitals, clinics, and other health care facilities are taking extreme measures to ensure the safety of their patients and staff, but it won't hurt to contact the facility where you plan to have your screening or treatment to learn what safety measures they are taking.

Screening Advice from Our Own Experts

PROSTATE CANCER SCREENING

“In prostate cancer cases that require active therapy, fractionated radiation therapy can not only be extremely successful at treating localized prostate cancer; it can be more cost-effective and convenient for patients. In order to get the most effective treatment, it’s crucial to identify prostate cancer in its earliest stages, which makes regular prostate cancer screenings an important part of your regular health maintenance.” – Joseph Ravalese, III, MD, Radiation Oncologist

Screening recommendations

Annual prostate-specific antigen (PSA) blood test and digital rectal examination (DRE) to look for abnormal or suspicious masses for:

- All men starting at age 50
- African-American men and men with a strong family history starting at age 45
- Men with multiple first-degree relatives affected at an early age starting as early as age 40



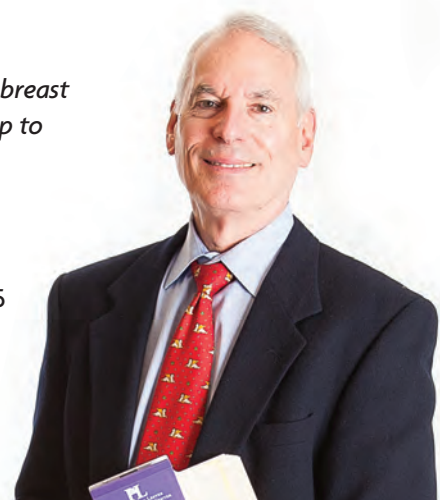
BREAST CANCER SCREENING

“While self-exams and close attention to any breast changes are an important way to monitor breast health, regular mammograms are the best method of finding breast cancer early, sometimes up to three years before it can be felt.” – Jeffrey A. Bitterman, MD, Radiation Oncologist

Screening recommendations

Annual image screenings (mammograms) for:

- All women starting at age 40-45, with the option to move to screenings every year after age 55
- Women with BRCA mutations in the immediate family, or who have a family history of breast cancer, starting at age 30
- Women who received mantle radiation between the ages of 10 and 30, starting eight years after the radiation therapy, but not before age 25



LUNG CANCER SCREENING

“Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer-related death in America, in part because it is difficult to detect in the early stages. Low-dose screening can help detect lung cancer early, when there is a better chance for successful treatment.” – Douglas Housman, MD, Radiation Oncologist

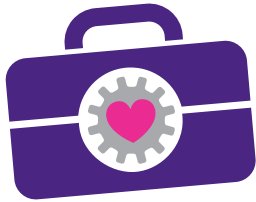
Screening recommendations

Annual low-dose computed tomography (LDCT) scan for all men and women who:

- Have a history of heavy smoking (e.g., one pack a day for 30 years or two packs a day for 15 years)
- Still smoke or quit less than 15 years ago
- Are aged 55-80



Find screening guidelines for men and women on our website at leevercancercenter.org/care-services/cancer-screening.



Self-Care Is Still Right Here

Our Toolbox Series Is Now Virtual!

This year has been a challenging one, and we could all use a little extra self-care. At the Leever Cancer Center, we want you to know: We're here for you.

Our ongoing "Building Your Self-Care Toolbox" series, which offers regular no-cost workshops to our cancer patients, caregivers, and the community to lower their stress levels, has always received a great response from attendees. Now we are pleased to be able to continue offering this important resource in virtual form, with a self-guided, virtual toolbox.

The series will include four topics: **Breath Work**, **Guided Imagery**, **Nutrition**, and **Chair Yoga** (see more information, right).

Each video will be a 5- to 15-minute presentation hosted by members of our Toolbox Series Team. The videos will remain online so that they can be accessed anytime, as many times as you'd like, to give you some much-needed relaxation and self-care from the comfort of home. Please feel free to share with friends or family members who could benefit from them!

Check the Virtual Toolbox page on the Leever website for a list of video topics and release dates.

Latest Toolbox Series:

Breath Work Workshop

Led by Diane Lafferty, MSW, OSW-C

Sitting or lying down, Diane helps us to learn basic breath work techniques that teach us how to use our breath to relax and de-stress.

Guided Imagery Workshop

Led by Diane Lafferty, MSW, OSW-C

In this session, Diane uses guided imagery to help create a sense of calm and well-being. Find a comfortable chair and get ready to relax.

Nutrition Workshop

Led by Karen Sabbath, MS, RD, CSO

Join Karen as she takes us through the four main elements of any meal, with a focus on breakfast, and shows us how to make a simple and delicious recipe for breakfast on-the-go!

Chair Yoga Workshop

Led by Claudette Adams, E-RYT, The Ohm Center

Claudette will teach basic chair yoga techniques to help keep us moving. Chair yoga is gentle yoga done sitting in a chair. No yoga experience is necessary. Wear comfortable clothing and get ready to move and relax!



Our instructors (left to right): Diane Lafferty, MSW, OSW-C; Karen Sabbath, MS, RD, CSO; Claudette Adams, E-RYT, The Ohm Center



Very special thanks to Iwona and Shu Chen, HLRCC certified medical dosimetrists, who created this beautiful message of HOPE.

RELAY FOR LIFE 2020: FOCUS ON HOPE

This year the Leever Center was a sponsor for Relay for Life, which was a drive-through Luminaria Ceremony that began at sunset on Saturday, September 26, at Holy Cross High School in Waterbury.

The theme this year was "Focus on HOPE." We thank everyone who participated. Hope will never be canceled!

Maintaining Connections During COVID-19

We all need human connections, but how do you make and maintain those connections when so many in-person events are on hold?

Human beings are social creatures, and we all need social connections to make us feel close to others and part of a community. People with strong social connections are happier, healthier, and live longer.

So now that COVID-19 has forced us to curtail or cancel so many social activities, it's more important than ever to find ways to keep social connections strong.

"As the pandemic continues, many people have told us they feel isolated and alone, especially because they cannot get together with friends and family," said Melissa Seres, MSW, LCSW, OSW-C, the Leever Cancer Center's social worker. "Fortunately, there are several easy ways you can make new connections and nurture your existing relationships, even when you can't do so in person."

Take Stock of Your Social Connections: Make a list of the people in your life and the activities you used to attend — everything from book clubs to dinners out to going to the gym. Next time you're feeling alone, your list will be a source of ideas for making or renewing connections.

Reach Out to Old Friends: Maybe you've fallen out of touch or simply haven't had time to get together, but now is a great time to contact friends or relatives you haven't seen in a while. A simple effort to make a connection might make someone else's day as well as your own.

Embrace Technology: When in-person interactions aren't possible, social media and other technology, like FaceTime, Google Hangouts, and even texting offer a great way to stay connected to your social circle, or to establish or join a new group. Join a Facebook group based on one of your interests or suggest a virtual get-together with a group of friends like a game night, happy hour, or book club.

Take an Online Class: Many fitness centers, community centers, and continuing education institutions are now offering a wide variety of online classes. Check resources in your area for class schedules, or go even further afield — since attending in-person isn't an issue, you're free to look into online classes in another city, state, even another country!

Find an Online Support Group: If you or a friend or family member needs help with depression, anxiety, addiction, or any other issue, you're not alone. There are hundreds of support groups offering online meetings, and many mental health professionals are still seeing patients via phone or videoconferencing.

The pandemic may have changed our lives, but it hasn't changed our need to connect with others. Use these tips to enrich your life and keep your sense of connection strong.



9 Ideas for a Quick Energy Boost

Feeling "blah" lately? Undergoing cancer treatment in the midst of a pandemic, not to mention all the other stresses and worries of life, could make anyone feel a little low. Next time you could use an energy boost, try one of these quick pick-me-ups.

- 1 Take a walk: Exercise, even mild exercise, is one of the best ways to improve your energy levels, and it will make you feel better mentally too.
- 2 Have a snack: If you're feeling sluggish, have a small, nutritious snack like nuts, fruit, veggies, yogurt, or a hard-boiled egg.
- 3 Take a cat nap: Experts say even a quick 20-minute nap will leave you refreshed without interfering with your nighttime sleep routine.
- 4 Go outside: Being outdoors is a great energy and mood booster, even if it's just sitting on the porch watching the birds.
- 5 Call a friend: Sometimes hearing a friendly voice is enough to lift your mood and improve your sense of well-being.
- 6 Laugh: Laughter releases endorphins that increase energy levels and reduce stress and anxiety, so fire up those cat videos or watch a favorite funny movie.
- 7 Have a glass of water: Fight dehydration-related fatigue by drinking plenty of water.
- 8 Get some sun: Sunshine invigorates your body and stimulates the production of vitamin D. Don't forget to wear sunblock!
- 9 Have some chocolate: Not only is it delicious; it has flavonoids that have been shown to boost cognitive skills and improve mood. (See our Nutrition Notes article on page 6.)

Chocolate

By Karen Sabbath, MS, RD, CSO

Health or Hype?

OPEN MOUTH. INSERT CHOCOLATE. CLOSE EYES. SAVOR. SMILE.

Chocolate is one of America's favorite foods and is often associated with love, comfort, and well-being. In fact, every year, Americans consume about eight billion pounds (11 pounds per person) and spend over \$22 billion on chocolate. Halloween and Valentine's Day are all about chocolate.

Chocolate comes from the cacao plant, and its seed, cocoa bean, is rich in flavanols, a type of flavonoid phytochemical which is a potent antioxidant. Antioxidants help to prevent cell damage and reduce inflammation.

There are many health claims attributed to consuming chocolate, but are they legitimate? Let's take a look.

POTENTIAL HEALTH BENEFITS OF FLAVANOLS IN CHOCOLATE

Heart attack risk reduction:

Flavanols appear to make platelets in the blood less sticky and less able to clot, therefore reducing the risk of a heart attack. They also have the potential to reduce plaque formation, lower blood pressure and improve blood flow to the heart.

Cholesterol: Dark chocolate has been shown to raise HDL (good cholesterol) and lower LDL (bad cholesterol).

Diabetes: Studies have found that eating a small amount of dark chocolate every day lowered insulin resistance (inability of insulin to do its job), which improves the metabolism of glucose and lowers overall risk of diabetes as well as heart disease.

Brain function: Cocoa or dark chocolate may improve brain and cognitive function by increasing blood flow to the brain.

Skin protection: Some studies have indicated that the flavanols in dark chocolate can protect against sun damage, improve blood flow to the

skin, and increase skin density and hydration.

Athletic performance: A little dark chocolate might boost oxygen availability during fitness training. This same effect was noted with competitive cyclists doing time trials.

CHOOSING YOUR CHOCOLATE:

Before you start gobbling up mountains of chocolate in the hopes of living a longer, healthier life, you need to know that not all chocolate is created equal.

In its purest form, cocoa is strong and pungent, due to its high content of flavanols. The more it is processed, the lower the flavanol content becomes. The fat in cocoa beans, also known as cocoa butter, can be healthy, but during processing, other less healthy fats can be added (milk fat, partially hydrogenated vegetable oil, coconut or palm oil), as well as lots of sugar, both of which make the chocolate less healthy and higher in calories, and potentially negating the benefits.

TOP CHOCOLATE PICKS

- Look for 70% - 85% cocoa on the label.
- Unprocessed cocoa powder (avoid Dutch-processed) and unsweetened baking chocolate rank first and second, have the most flavonoids, and are lowest in fat, sugar, and calories.
- Dark chocolate and semisweet chocolate chips rank third.
- Milk chocolate and chocolate syrup are at the bottom of the list.
- White chocolate tastes good, but isn't technically chocolate.

HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

Keep your portions small and high quality. One ounce of very dark chocolate with greater than 70% cocoa (approximately 150 calories) may provide some health benefits. And remember to open mouth, insert chocolate, close eyes, savor, and smile.

Questions about nutrition? Contact nutritionist Karen Sabbath, MS, RD, CSO, at ksabbath@leeevercancercenter.org or 203-575-5510.

FRENCH CHOCOLATE BARK

Ingredients:

- 16 oz. good dark chocolate, chopped
- 1/2 cup whole roasted, salted almonds
- 1/2 cup whole roasted, salted pistachios
- 1 cup chopped dried apricots
- 1/2 cup dried cranberries
- Coarse salt, optional

Directions:

- 1 Melt the chocolate in a Pyrex bowl set over a pan of simmering water.
- 2 Line a cookie sheet with parchment paper. Using a ruler and pencil, draw a 9" x 10" rectangle on the paper.
- 3 Turn paper face down on the baking sheet.
- 4 Pour melted chocolate over the paper and spread to form a rectangle, using the outline as a guide.
- 5 Sprinkle the nuts and dried fruits over the chocolate.
- 6 Allow to cool and harden for at least 4-8 hours.
- 7 Cut the bark into 1" x 2" pieces, or break it into any size you wish. Serve at room temperature.
- 8 Cut-up bark can be refrigerated.

Makes 24+ pieces. Adapted from Ina Garten/foodnetwork.com.

A Community of Caring

The Harold Leever Regional Cancer Center wishes to express its appreciation to our neighbors and friends...

In addition to everyone we recognized in our last AWARE, we thank the following individuals, businesses, and organizations for their generous donations of masks: **Carole Dichele, Robin Wyatt Ford, Kelly Johnson, Jocelyn Lane, Middlebury Tailoring & More, Gerta Karameta, Quilts That Care, Sue Lavoie, Debbie Palmer, Kitty Vangunten, and DeShawnya (Beamon) Walker.**

We are most grateful to **Raymond, General Manager at Dollar General, Watertown**, who alerted us when certain cleaning products were in stock.

Our sincere gratitude to **Mike Mancini and The Hartford** for another generous donation of patient care bags.



Our great appreciation to **Darlene Jacovino and the Watertown High School Swim Team** for their support and generous gift.



Deborah Parkinson and Melissa Seres from HLRCC accept 158 assorted gift cards for patients from **Christine Damato** (center) who coordinated a Facebook fundraiser and raised almost \$4,000!

AWARE!

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We encourage your feedback.
If there is a cancer topic you would like covered, to respond to an article you've read, or to be put on our mailing list, please call 203-575-5555 or email: dparkinson@leevercancercenter.org



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What's on your mind?

AWARE is designed to help you, the Leever community, so we need your feedback.

Visit leevercancercenter.org/myleever to tell us what you'd like to see in upcoming editions of AWARE. We'd love to hear from you!





HELPFUL RESOURCES

For programs providing support and information:
211 or 211.org

Honoring Those Who Care

These posters featuring the health care heroes who work in the Leever Cancer Center building were proudly displayed!



Direct numbers for specific resources:

Domestic violence

888-774-2900 English
844-831-9200 Spanish
800-799-7233 National

Suicide

866-794-0021 Greater Waterbury
800-273-8255 National

Child abuse

800-842-2288

Crisis hotline for teens and young adults

Text "listen" to 741741

Parenting support

Talk It Out
833-258-5011 or talkitout.com

Elder abuse

888-385-4225

Sexual assault

888-999-5545 English
888-568-8332 Spanish

Veterans crisis hotline

800-273-8255 and press 1
Text: 838255
or veteranscrisisline.net

Alcoholics Anonymous

866-783-7712 English
855-377-2628 Spanish
or ct-aa.org

Narcotics Anonymous

800-662-4357/800-420-9064
ctna.org

National Alliance of Mental Health (NAMI)

800-215-3021

Food resources

ctfoodbank.org
(Local food pantries can be looked up by zip code)

Important Information about the Leever Cancer Center

As always, the health and safety of our patients and staff are of the utmost importance, and we are doing everything we can to ensure that we are able to provide the necessary care to our patients while protecting against the spread of COVID-19.

For the most up-to-date patient alerts and safety precautions, go to leevercancercenter.org/news/important-information-about-the-leever-cancer-center.

All onsite support groups and events are cancelled through the end of December 2020.

Although we no longer have in-person support groups at this time, we have some virtual/online resources:

- Look Good Feel Better: For a virtual workshop and to receive your free makeup kit, visit lookgoodfeelbetter.org/alliance-partner-virtual-workshops/.
- Brave at Heart Zoom Meetings: Contact Anne Pringle, 203-910-7582, for more information.
- To view an extensive list of online support groups: cancercare.org/support_groups.