

# AWARE! | HL

Prevention and awareness information from The Harold Leever Regional Cancer Center



## Latest Technology at Leever

*GE Discovery™ MI DR PET/CT significantly improves diagnostic accuracy and reduces patient exposure to radiation by more than 50 percent.*

There has never been a time in the history of cancer research when scientific breakthroughs and technological innovations have come at a more rapid and steady pace. It is a time of strengthening optimism, rising survival rates, and continuously improving treatment options for cancer patients. As these advances revolutionize the way we treat the disease, cancer centers are being challenged to invest in the new technologies that allow them to remain at the forefront of cancer care.

“When we opened our doors more than 15 years ago, we did so with an eye toward the future — with the understanding that we would continue to change and grow in ways that would allow us to remain on the cutting edge of cancer care and treatment,” says Kevin Kniery, executive director of The Harold Leever Regional Cancer Center. “Along with our Board of Directors and its members, Saint Mary’s Hospital, and Waterbury Hospital, we have done just that by continuously investing in new and emerging technologies. The evolution of our PET/CT center is an excellent example of our commitment to our mission.”

Leever’s first PET/CT facility was a mobile unit, much like those at other facilities across the region. Then, in 2006, the Leever Cancer Center opened a new 4,000-square-foot PET/CT Imaging Center, one of a few such centers in the area, and the only dedicated PET/CT in a radiation oncology department in the state of Connecticut. Over the years, regular investments in system updates and processes continued to advance Leever’s capabilities, while laying the groundwork for a major renovation of the center, completed earlier this year. The work included the installation of a state-of-the-art, premium PET/CT system. The GE Discovery™ MI DR is built for speed and accuracy, employing an extremely high-sensitivity detector and the most innovative reconstruction technology available. The result: unparalleled resolution that can detect even very small lesions earlier in the life of the disease, and repeatable measurement accuracy from one exam to

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## Latest Technology...

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the next that may reduce CT dose by up to 60 percent with improved image quality.

“The new system offers patients two critical advantages,” notes Radiation Oncologist Jeffrey Bitterman. “The diagnostic sensitivity of the scan is much higher and exposes the patient to less than 50 percent of the radiation dose as compared to previous generation scanners. That means I can more accurately delineate the precise location of the tumor, which could change our treatment plan dramatically. That in turn means fewer side effects and better outcomes for patients!”

PET/CT images offer precise and detailed information about the exact location and metabolic status of a tumor. The combined clinical images provide important information for radiologists, dosimetrists, radiation oncologists, and surgical oncologists. They also offer information about the effectiveness of ongoing chemo or

radiation therapy treatments, which allows doctors to accurately adjust to optimize effectiveness.

“The PET/CT scanner plays a critical role in oncologic care,” says Dr. Douglas Housman, a radiation oncologist at Leever. “It is a critical component of diagnosis in a great number of disease sites. With regard to lung cancer, for example, PET/CT imaging is part of a standard of care; a critical component in establishing the extent of disease. The new system incorporates a more sensitive scanner that will allow us to see things earlier and perhaps intervene earlier to improve patient outcomes.”

In addition to the technological upgrades, the Imaging Center also got a facelift, with changes to the walls, floors, and ceilings.

“Aesthetically, the new room and the layout of the new area are quite pleasing and calming,” says Dr. Bitterman. “I’m a firm believer in



*Dr. Douglas Housman,  
Radiation Oncologist*

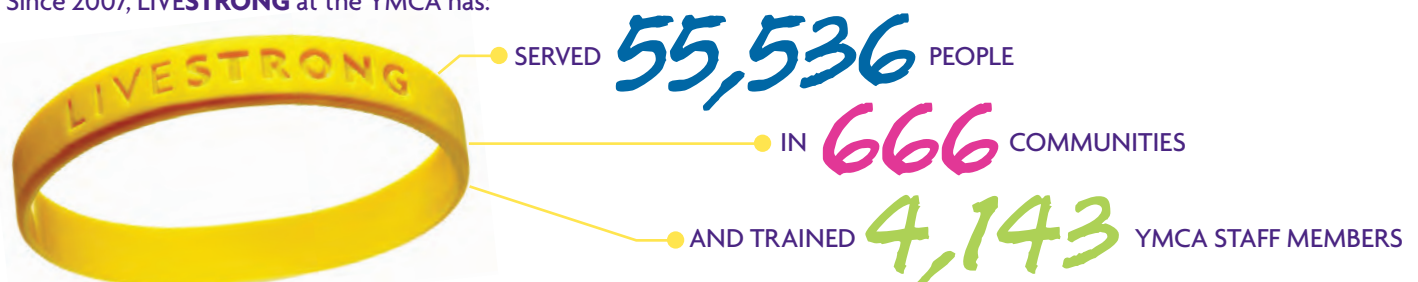
the mind-body connection, so if our patients feel more comfortable in the renovated space, I think that can make for a more positive, pleasant experience overall.”

## LIVESTRONG at the YMCA

As the cancer survivor population grows, so does the need for programs meeting their very specific needs. In 2011, the Leever Cancer Center launched “Stepping Forward,” a unique program aggregating information on post-treatment care, programs, and services dedicated to helping cancer survivors thrive. Among those programs: **LIVESTRONG** at the YMCA, a national partnership between the **LIVESTRONG** Foundation and the YMCA, with local affiliates in a number of locations, including downtown Waterbury.

Established in 2007, **LIVESTRONG** at the YMCA is a 12-week, research-based program designed to help adult cancer survivors reclaim their total health. Participants work with specially trained YMCA staff members to rebuild muscle mass and strength, increase flexibility and endurance, and improve balance, range of motion, confidence, and self-esteem, all with the goal of moving beyond cancer in mind, body, and spirit. The program at the Greater Waterbury YMCA includes a no-cost 12-week Y membership, with access to all of facility amenities and special classes for cancer survivors. The program meets twice each week for 1-1/2 hours, with day and evening session options. Space is limited. For more information, contact Meghan Lennon at 203-754-9622, ext. 155. Learn more at [waterburyymca.org](http://waterburyymca.org) or at [livestrong.org](http://livestrong.org).

Since 2007, **LIVESTRONG** at the YMCA has:





Spotlight on:

## Dr. Elena Ratner, Gynecologic Oncologist

Yale Gynecologic Oncology Program physician Dr. Elena Ratner now brings her clinical expertise and deep commitment to highly personalized patient care to the Leever-based offices of the Smilow Cancer Hospital. Twice each month Dr. Ratner joins Drs. Chang, Katoch, and Sabbath in seeing patients on the second floor of the Leever Cancer Center.

“Gynecologic oncology is a highly specialized field,” said Kevin Kniery, executive director of the Leever Cancer Center. “Dr. Ratner is widely regarded as a leading innovator in both research and specialized patient care. To have her services available to patients at our facility is a testament to our commitment to making the highest level of cancer care accessible to patients throughout the region.”

Dr. Ratner is a board-certified gynecologic oncologist specializing in ovarian malignancies. She is an associate professor in the Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Sciences at the Yale University School of Medicine, co-director of Yale’s Discovery to Cure program, and director of the Discovery to Cure Early Ovarian Cancer Detection program.

An advocate for cancer survivors, Dr. Ratner is also co-founder and director of the Yale Medicine Sexual Intimacy and Menopause Program (SIMS), one of the first programs in the country to focus on supporting cancer survivors coping with intimacy issues. Her professional interests include chemotherapy-targeted drug development, patient quality of life programs, and early cancer detection.

To schedule an appointment with Dr. Ratner in Waterbury, please call 203-755-6311.

**“We know that when these cancers are caught early they are very, very curable...”**

— Elena Ratner, MD

## In Memory of Dr. P

(From left) Drs. Joseph Ravalese, Jeffrey Bitterman, and Douglas Housman honored Dr. Bernard Percarpio with a plaque at the Leever Cancer Center.

“Bernie, or Dr. P as he loved being called, was instrumental in the idea of a cancer center in Waterbury,” said Dr. Ravalese when the memorial plaque was unveiled. “He was intimately involved in its design, and through his superb clinical skills, its success. He loved the Leever Cancer Center, and those of us privileged to work with him loved him as well. He will remain in our memory as a model physician, colleague, and friend.”



## Bon Chance, Dianne!

The front office at the Leever Cancer Center is, for many, the first face-to-face interaction with Leever and, for just over 18 years, Office Manager Dianne Bedard (left) kept it running like a well-oiled machine.

“Dianne was instrumental in establishing policies and procedures that allowed every member of the front office team to make meaningful contributions to our day-to-day operations, and, more importantly, to make every patient feel welcome,” said Operations Director Deborah Parkinson. Thank you, Dianne! You will be missed.

# Giving Your Immune System a Boost

## *Is it Possible?*

By Karen Sabbath, MS, RD, CSO

There are more than 1000 supplements currently available in stores and online that claim to boost one's immunity. Their claims to fend off infection, bounce back from injuries, reduce the likelihood of cancer and other diseases, and prevent damage from environmental pollutants are just a few of the purported benefits. Who wouldn't want to swallow them by the fistful? But do they work?

A healthy immune system should do all of those things – and when it is in peak form, the molecules, cells, tissues, and organs that comprise our immunity work quite effectively to combat the many assaults to our body on a daily basis. Occasionally, a germ invades our system and we get sick, but our immune system kicks into high gear and helps restore us to health, sometimes with the help of medications, like antibiotics.



In autoimmune diseases, like lupus, Crohn's, rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis, or Type 1 diabetes, to name just a few, the immune system goes into overdrive and takes aim at its own cells, causing damage, inflammation, and impaired quality of life.

The concept of "boosting your immunity" is a tempting idea to embrace, but the immune system is just that: an intricate system, not a single entity. And because of its complexity, it is hard to single out one or two things that will alone increase its function. There is no one single food or supplement that has been found to affect the entire immune system. Research continues in this area, but to date, there is little to no concrete evidence.

### DO SUPPLEMENTS HELP?

Current research finds that certain vitamin or mineral deficiencies

can increase the risk of infection, but providing those supplements does not appear to enhance immune function. These include vitamins A, C, D, E, as well as the mineral zinc. Unfortunately, the common myths that vitamin C prevents colds and the use of zinc can shorten the duration of a cold have not panned out in clinical trials. In fact, taking too much zinc, iron, vitamin A, or folate can actually impair the immune system. Research continues in this area.

### AGING AND IMMUNITY

As we age, our immune system weakens, which is why older people are more prone to infections, slower to heal from surgery, and get less benefit from protective vaccines, according to Janko Nikolich-Zugich, MD, PhD, an immunologist from the University of Arizona. He also notes that "the strength of the immune system is tied to healthy lifestyle, exercise, good nutrition, and sufficient rest." As people age, it can be difficult to meet these goals, which can further reduce immunity.

But before you throw up your hands in frustration, keep in mind that there are many things you can do to maximize your immunity and lower the risk of infection.

### LIFESTYLE CHANGES THAT MAXIMIZE YOUR IMMUNITY

- **Eat well.** Consume a diet that is high in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. By eating a variety of healthy foods, you will ensure that you are getting all of the nutrients that are essential for good immune health.
- **Exercise regularly.** A target of 30 minutes of physical activity a day is a great goal.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.**
- **Keep your alcohol intake to a minimum.** Too much alcohol can suppress immunity.
- **Try to get 7-8 hours of sleep a night.** Adequate sleep appears to help our immune system fight off viruses.
- **Take steps to avoid infection,** such as frequent and thorough hand



*There are many things you can*

washing and safe food handling practices.

- **Try to minimize stress.** We all have stress in our lives, but scientists are trying to determine the effects of chronic stressors on health and immunity.

- **Don't smoke!**

### FOODS THAT MAY BOOST YOUR IMMUNITY

- **Probiotics:** These are the good bacteria that live in your gut and keep it healthy, as well as keeping your immune system strong. Some people take probiotic supplements if they are unable to get them from food or if they are taking certain antibiotics.

*Food sources: Yogurt, kefir, sauerkraut, and kombucha*

- **Prebiotics:** These are foods that provide fuel for probiotics, and are found in the non-digestible fibers in high-fiber foods.

*Food sources: Oranges, beans, oats, asparagus, and bananas*

- **Fish oils and/or omega-3 fatty acids:** These beneficial fats help the heart by preventing blood clots and reducing inflammation. They may also play a role in lowering risk of other medical conditions, including cancer.

*Food sources: Fatty fish, like salmon, or certain plant foods, like walnuts and flaxseeds, that contain fats that are converted to omega-3s*

- **Phytochemicals:** These are biologically active compounds and antioxidants found in plants that promote health and immunity.

*Food sources: Fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, and nut.*

- **Foods containing vitamins A, C, D, and E, plus minerals zinc and copper:** These all contribute to a healthy immune system. Many of the foods that are rich in these

## CARROT SLAW

WITH CRANBERRIES, TOASTED WALNUTS AND CITRUS VINAIGRETTE

### Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup walnuts, coarsely chopped
- 1 pound grated carrots or 1 1/3 pounds carrots, peeled and grated
- 1 tsp. lemon zest and 2 tbsp. lemon juice (from 1 juicy lemon)
- 1/2 cup dried cranberries
- 3 scallions, white and green parts, thinly sliced
- 3 tbsp. chopped fresh Italian parsley
- 3 tbsp. extra virgin olive oil or walnut oil
- 3 tbsp. freshly squeezed orange juice from 1 orange
- 2 tbsp. honey
- 1/4 tsp. coarse salt
- 1/4 tsp. ground pepper

Serves 4-6. Adapted from [onceuponachef.com](http://onceuponachef.com)

### Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350. Place walnuts on baking sheet and bake until toasted and fragrant, 7-10 minutes. Set aside to cool. This can be done in advance.
2. Combine carrots, lemon zest, cranberries, scallions, and parsley in large bowl.
3. Combine dressing ingredients (oil, lemon juice, orange juice, honey, salt, and pepper) in small bowl and whisk together or place ingredients in a small jar and shake to combine.
4. Add dressing to salad, mix well, and allow at least 15 minutes for flavors to blend.
5. Add walnuts before serving, and season with additional salt, pepper, honey, and/or citrus to taste.

vitamins also contain phytonutrients and antioxidants.

*Food sources:*

*Vitamin A: Sweet potatoes, carrots, winter squash and pumpkin, cantaloupe, whole milk, liver, and eggs*

*Vitamin C: Citrus fruits, kiwi, mango, cauliflower, and green peppers*

*Vitamin D: Absorbed through your skin from exposure to the sun, as well as in egg yolks, saltwater fish and fortified foods like milk*

*Vitamin E: Found in vegetable oils, nuts, seeds, and leafy greens*

*Zinc: Found in dark meats, nuts, whole grains, and beans*

*Copper: Found in beans, nuts, leafy greens, and shrimp*

### ARE THERE FOODS THAT ARE BAD FOR YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM?

Eating too much added sugar, processed foods, refined starches (like white bread and white rice), excessive amounts of saturated fats (from red

meat, butter, lard, or coconut fat), or trans-fats, can increase inflammation, contribute to chronic disease and weight gain, and provide little nutrition. Eating them once in a while is okay, but try to include these foods sparingly.

### BOTTOM LINE

Because of its complexity, it is difficult to determine exactly what makes the immune system function at its peak. But we know that our best bet for immune and overall health is to eat a variety of healthy foods, especially fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts and seeds, lean protein and healthy fats, and adopt a healthy lifestyle. Although many people would rather pop a pill to get the desired benefits, it's the benefits derived from our diet that appear to have the greatest impact.

**Questions about nutrition?** Contact our nutritionist, Karen Sabbath, MS, RD, CSO, at 203-575-5510 or email her at [ksabbath@leevercancercenter.org](mailto:ksabbath@leevercancercenter.org).

*do to maximize your immunity...*



# Doing Our Part: Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month

**March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, and the Leever Cancer Center did its part to raise awareness in the community by hosting two no-cost educational programs.**



On March 15, Dr. Iyare Esemuede of The Stanley J. Dudrick Department of Surgery at Saint Mary's Hospital presented information about the diagnosis and management of colorectal cancer. When found early, colorectal cancer is highly treatable. A healthy diet and regular exercise may also help prevent colorectal cancer, but so does knowing your risk. Colorectal cancer is one form of cancer that may have a genetic link.

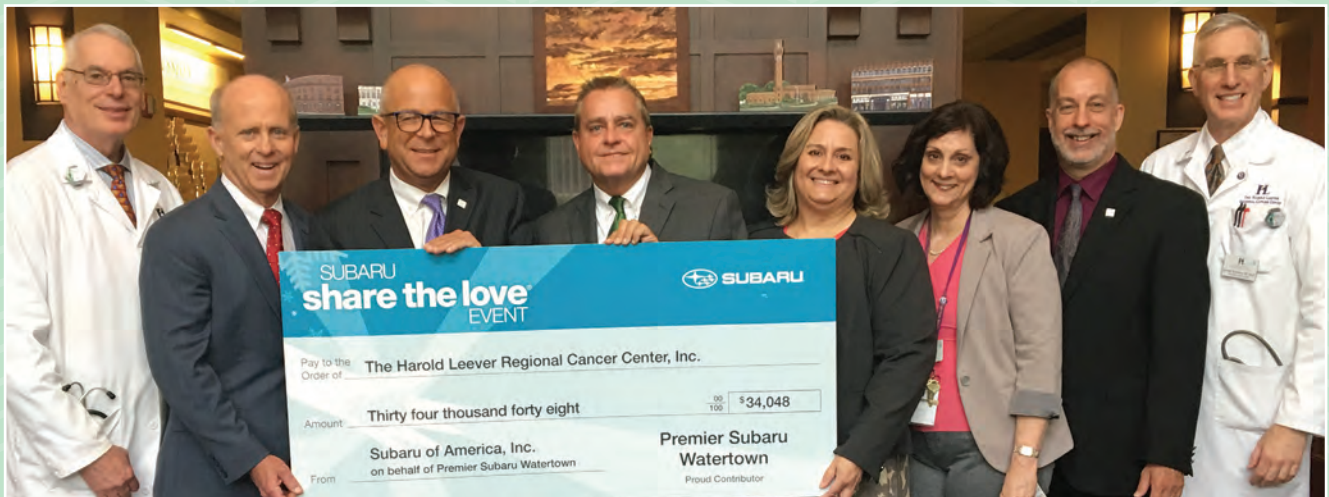
Dr. Esemuede shared the platform with Yvonne Ruddy-Stein, an APRN with Polokoff Breast Care, LLC, who talked about the increased use and availability of genetic testing and helped participants understand the genetic factors that may influence a person's risk of developing colorectal cancer.

The series concluded on March 22 when Dr. John Zhang of Alliance Medical Group and Waterbury Hospital shared information with the community about new and innovative colorectal cancer treatments.

"The American Cancer Society tells us that colorectal cancer survival rates have been increasing for both men and women for the past few decades," explains Leever Cancer Center Operations Director Deborah Parkinson. "They also tell us that one of the reasons for that trend is increased awareness about the importance of screening and early detection. I believe that free programs like those we offered in March have played an important role in educating the community in ways that have the potential to save lives."

Top photo: Dr. John Zhang.

Bottom photo: Yvonne Ruddy-Stein, APRN and Dr. Iyare Esemuede



For the second year, Premier Subaru of Watertown selected The Harold Leever Cancer Center as the hometown charity for its "Sharing the Love" campaign. "We are so grateful for all you do," said Robert J. Alvine, president and general manager of Premier Subaru. "There is so much care and compassion here at The Leever Center. It's not the machines, it's the people behind the machines that makes the difference."

Pictured from left to right: Jeffrey Bitterman, MD; Kevin Kniery, Executive Director, HLRCC; Robert Alvine, President of Premier Subaru; Robert Scannell, Town Manager, Watertown; Kerri Pacheco, VP of Premier Subaru; Deborah Parkinson, Operations Director, HLRCC; Bob Bennett, District Sales Manager, Subaru of New England; Joseph Ravalese III, MD.

# A Community of Caring

The Harold Leever Regional Cancer Center wishes to express its appreciation and a sincere thank you to its neighbors and friends by recognizing the spirit and hard work of the members of our community in fulfilling the Mission of the Leever Cancer Center.

It takes a village, and at the Leever Cancer Center we are both amazed and grateful for the caring, dedication, and generosity of the community that surrounds us. We extend our deep and heartfelt thanks to:

**Girl Scout Troop 64009**, representing Middlebury and Southbury, who delivered 30 care packages for our patients, filled with items such as cards, puzzle books, snacks, and hand lotion.

**Malcolina Couvertier and her family**, who put together amazing care packages for Leever patients.

Volleyball players from Middlebury's **Westover School** who, along with coach **Dak Manella**, made cards for Leever patients. Go Wildcats!

**The Driggs School** family, who raised \$745 for the Leever Cancer Center during their "Pink Out" day. The donation honored staff member and cancer survivor **Lucy Sheetz**.

**The Watertown Fire Department**, for selling T-shirts and donating the proceeds to Leever.

**The staff of Northwest CT Public Safety (right)** for their generous cash donation.

Every generation of the **Schenker family** for their generous donation of gift bags.

Students from **Swift Middle School** in Watertown, who raised nearly \$600 by selling breast cancer awareness bracelets.

Longtime Team Leever/Connecticut Challenge supporter **Russ Naylor**, for his generous donation in honor of his mother, **Pat Naylor**, and several friends, neighbors, and family members — survivors and warriors alike.

**Judy Doran** and the customers and staff at the **Charcoal Chef** in Woodbury, who raffled off pink baskets to raise money and awareness.

**Quench Café** in Waterbury for hosting a breast cancer awareness benefit.



Pink drinks, pink food, live music, and raffles all made for a fun event.

The **Watertown High School Girls Swimming and Diving Team**, who sold pink ducks and T-shirts to benefit Leever during a cancer awareness event.

The students from Watertown's **St. John the Evangelist School** for making and delivering cheerful cards for our patients.

**Krista Palomba**, who previously donated 95 gift bags to patients at HLRCC and returned with more gifts! Her bags include blankets, lotions, soaps, and other comfort items.



Our sincere thanks to the Watertown Police Department for making Leever the beneficiary of their Third Annual Charity Golf Tournament, and to the players, donors, sponsors, and volunteers who make the event happen. Proceeds support our Stepping Forward Survivorship Program. Above: HLRCC Executive Director Kevin Kniery (far left) and Finance Director Tom Belzek accepted a check for \$19,000 from Officers Christopher Donston and Christopher Paquin.

## 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](mailto:dparkinson@leevercancercenter.org)



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# Community Events and Monthly Support Groups

SPRING/SUMMER

## UPCOMING EVENT:



**AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY'S  
GREATER WATERBURY RELAY FOR LIFE:  
Saturday, June 2, 8 AM**

**at Frisbie Elementary School, Wolcott**

The Greater Waterbury Relay for Life turns 25! This signature fundraiser for the American Cancer Society raises money to help make a global impact on cancer. Make your impact felt: Join Team Leever on the track between 8 AM and 12 AM on Saturday, June 2.

## SAVE THE DATE:

**On the Wings of Hope**

**2ND ANNUAL SURVIVORS DAY BUTTERFLY RELEASE:  
Saturday, August 4, 10 AM at HLRCC**

For a \$10 donation, you may set a butterfly free on a journey of hope to honor or memorialize a loved one.

For more information, please contact Deborah Parkinson at 203-575-5564 or [dparkinson@leevercancercenter.org](mailto:dparkinson@leevercancercenter.org). See [leevercancercenter.org](http://leevercancercenter.org) for an order form.

**AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY: LOOK GOOD, FEEL BETTER!:** monthly, 1st Tuesday, 2 PM – 4 PM, contact the ACS at 203-756-8888

**AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY: REACH TO RECOVERY:** by appointment, contact the ACS at 203-756-8888

**AMPUTE E SUPPORT GROUP:** monthly, 3rd Friday, 5 PM, contact Dila Hassiem: 203-597-8818

**ART THERAPY:** monthly, 2nd and 4th Friday, 1 PM, contact Deborah Parkinson: 203-575-5564

**BETTER BREATHING CLUB:** monthly, 3rd Friday, 1 PM, contact Rachel Kirchner: 203-757-4991

**BRAVE AT HEART BREAST CANCER SUPPORT GROUP:** monthly, 1st Wednesday, 7 PM – 9 PM, contact Anne Pringle: 203-910-7582

**COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS:** monthly, 2nd Wednesday, 6:45 PM – 10 PM, contact Sharon: 860-384-1398

**CT MULTIPLE MYELOMA FIGHTERS SUPPORT GROUP:** At Prospect Library, monthly, 2nd Tuesday, 6 PM – 8 PM, contact Robin Tuohy: 203-206-3536

**ENERGY THERAPY:** Tuesdays and Wednesdays, contact Melissa Seres, MSW: 203-575-5511

**FAMILY AND FRIENDS SUPPORT GROUP:** monthly, 3rd Monday, 12 PM – 1 PM, contact Melissa Seres, MSW: 203-575-5511

**FREEDOM FROM SMOKING:** An 8-week smoking cessation series. Contact Sandra Micalizzi, APRN, CDE, Community Educator, at 203-575-5573 for information on the start of the next series.

**HOPE MUTUAL AID GROUP FOR PATIENTS AND THEIR LOVED ONES:** monthly, 1st and 3rd Tuesday, 12 PM – 1 PM, contact Melissa Seres: 203-575-5511

**JOURNALING: A WAY TO HEAL FROM YOUR CANCER EXPERIENCE:** Friday, 10 AM – 11:30 AM, contact Bob Devito: 203-910-3107

**QUILTS THAT CARE:** monthly, 1st and 3rd Monday, 6:30 PM – 8:30 PM, contact Deb V: 860-945-0184

**THYROID CANCER SUPPORT GROUP:** monthly, last Tuesday, 6 PM – 7 PM, contact Dot Torretta: 203-756-3481

**WATERBURY AREA OSTOMY SUPPORT GROUP:** monthly, 1st Monday, 6:30 PM – 8:30 PM, contact Bob Baker: 860-248-1116

**WOMAN TO WOMAN BREAST CANCER SUPPORT GROUP:** monthly, 3rd Tuesday, 7 PM – 8:30 PM, contact Theresa Lombardo: 860-274-2200

Call contact person to confirm that group is as scheduled. Meeting times may be rescheduled to accommodate holidays or special meetings. See [leevercancercenter.org](http://leevercancercenter.org) for ongoing events.