

# In The Spirit of Health

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS  
**MD Anderson**  
**Cancer Center**  
Making Cancer History®

"I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you." - 3 John 1:2

## Celebrating cancer survivors through cancerversaries



Surviving a cancer diagnosis can bring new meaning to a person's life. Stage IV breast cancer survivor Olivia Franz was told she had no evidence of disease on March 30, 2021.

"My family celebrates this day every year with a nice dinner and a cake that says, 'Good job not dying,'" says Olivia. "We're planning something big for five years – possibly a cruise or an international trip."

Some call plans like these a 'cancerversary.' The term combines the words 'cancer' and 'anniversary,' and it's used as a day of celebration for someone who has experienced cancer.

"Celebration dates are personal to every individual and what they feel was the most meaningful event for them," says senior social work counselor Tabeen Urbach. "Celebrations can occur on the day they were first diagnosed, the day they completed surgery to remove cancer, the day they completed treatment or any other milestone that is important to them."

There are many ways to celebrate a cancerversary. Whether that's having a dinner, throwing a party, planning a trip or even visiting the hospital where

you were treated. You can also choose to celebrate alone or with loved ones including your family, friends and caregivers.

It's also okay to not celebrate.

For some cancer survivors, a cancerversary is a reminder of a difficult period in their life. Survivors don't always have to celebrate right away. Bart Wilson was diagnosed with stage IV colon cancer at age 37 and was told he had a 15% chance of living five years.

"I'm not into big celebrations, but if I reach the five-year mark of being cancer-free next year, my family plans to take a big trip to celebrate," says Wilson. "They acknowledge the day I showed no evidence of disease each year, but I always wanted to reach that five-year mark before doing any celebrating."

Caregivers can also get in on the celebrations. Even if it's something small such as calling the survivor or spending time with them.

Whether you choose to celebrate your cancerversary or not, survivorship is something to be proud of.

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**- Tabeen Urbach, Senior Social Work Counselor**



# Spiritual connection through cancer

Having a religious or spiritual foundation can help you find meaning if you are coping with illness or caring for somebody. Try these three ways to help you connect:



## Connect with yourself

Practice self-reflection through meditation, connect with your body through yoga or perhaps try writing in a journal. Try to spend a portion of each day reflecting on your journey and thinking about what goals you have for the future.



## Connect with family and friends

Having a community of family and friends not only helps us in times of spiritual turmoil but can also help us to reaffirm our “why” in life. Your relationships with friends and family can help you nurture your spirituality and encourage you to deepen it. Being surrounded by people you trust can also help you to jump back into life’s trials.



## Connect with support

Whether you feel spiritually inclined or not, emotional support is a crucial step toward self-care. Consider reaching out to a trusted friend, religious counselor or support group to address any feelings you may be experiencing.

## Faith without works is dead - James 2:14



**Active Living after Cancer** is a Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas funded program designed to improve the quality of life for cancer survivors in Texas.

This free 12-week exercise program:

- Offers sessions in-person and virtually
- Includes physical activity and guided discussions on survivorship topics
- Incorporates pedometer, resistance band and other goodies to support fitness goals

Scan the QR code for more information on the Active Living After Cancer program.



If you have questions about In The Spirit of Health, e-mail [Community@MDAnderson.org](mailto:Community@MDAnderson.org) or call 713-792-3363.

