



CANCER AWAKENS

EBOOK SERIES - BOOK 10

Tips for Caregivers

Part 1



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Editor's Note

So you, or someone you care about, has cancer?



I, Vijay Bhat, had cancer too. In my case, it was colon cancer, stage 2. I benefited greatly from getting timely modern medical treatment. But my successful surgery for was only the beginning of a journey that changed the way I lived my life. I am now a 10-year survivor. No, I call myself a 10-year cancer *thrivor*.

In these 10 years, my wife (and caregiver), Nilima and I have studied and used many complementary and alternative healing approaches for cancer. We have come to realise there is a crying need to support mainstream medical treatments from a psychological, social and spiritual standpoint.

It takes a lot to live through cancer and through our e-book series, we hope to share the empowering lessons, tools and resources that can help you and your family to not only face the challenge, but also to grow from it. We hope you will find it enjoyable and useful ... and that you too, will become a cancer *thrivor*.

With all good wishes,

Vijay Bhat



The Tips for Caregivers Series is written by Nilima Bhat. She is a facilitator of personal transformation. Her journey through corporate life, marriage and motherhood, followed by Vijay's cancer experience led her to becoming a yoga teacher and holistic health coach. She believes the role of caregiver awakened her to her life-purpose.

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EBOOK FREELY

We have designed these e-books so that they are easy to read/ understand ... and also to print and share with those people who may not have access to, or be familiar with computer technology.

In this particular e-book 'Tips for Caregivers – Part 1', we share practical advise and knowledge that we wish we knew during our experience with cancer.



Tips for Caregivers is also
available in a short video

Lessons From A Caregiver's Journey: Introduction

There are few events that can throw your life off track like a loved-one's cancer diagnosis.

And if you are the closest or 'most able' relative that person has, you will suddenly find yourself catapulted into a role called 'primary care-giver' that no one has trained you for. There are no courses for facing such contingencies in life. It is purely on-the-job training, with no boss or mentor who can show you the ropes.

I have the benefit of my 'rear-view' mirror, because I have travelled this road before. Through this series of articles – and with the benefit of 20-20 hindsight – I hope to help ease parts of this difficult journey ahead. If you know what to expect, you can get some things out of the way and focus your precious, limited energy and resources on the important stuff.

Fasten your seat-belts ... even though it will be a rocky ride, it can also be a terrific growth opportunity for you and for the entire family.

Lesson 1: Wear your oxygen mask first

The cancer diagnosis blows a big,
unexpected hole in your energy supply.



It's like being on an aircraft which was flying smoothly, all under control, and suddenly the cabin pressure drops due to some unexpected turbulence. Your loved one starts gasping for air, demanding your intense and focused attention.

Thankfully, the oxygen-masks drop.

Now remember, just as they instruct on all flights, to “put on the oxygen-mask FIRST yourself” before you try helping anyone else.

The logic is simple. You are no good to anyone if you yourself run out of breath.

It will be hard to remember this in the months to come: the cancer treatment with its physical/ emotional drain on your loved one will be huge and you will be drawn willy-nilly to be the strong, unflagging, rock of support for him/her.

Make sure you nourish and energise yourself very well from day 1. No matter what, make sure you eat fresh, balanced and healthy meals on time. And don't forget regular exercise, ideally at least 20-30 mins, thrice a week and even better in natural surroundings. Most hospitals/ clinics are closed spaces with poor energy and the atmosphere of illness and despair doesn't exactly perk one up.

Find your own oxygen-mask. Is there a breathing-meditation routine that works for you? Or listening to particular music? A mature, cheerful friend/mentor YOU can reach out to regularly?

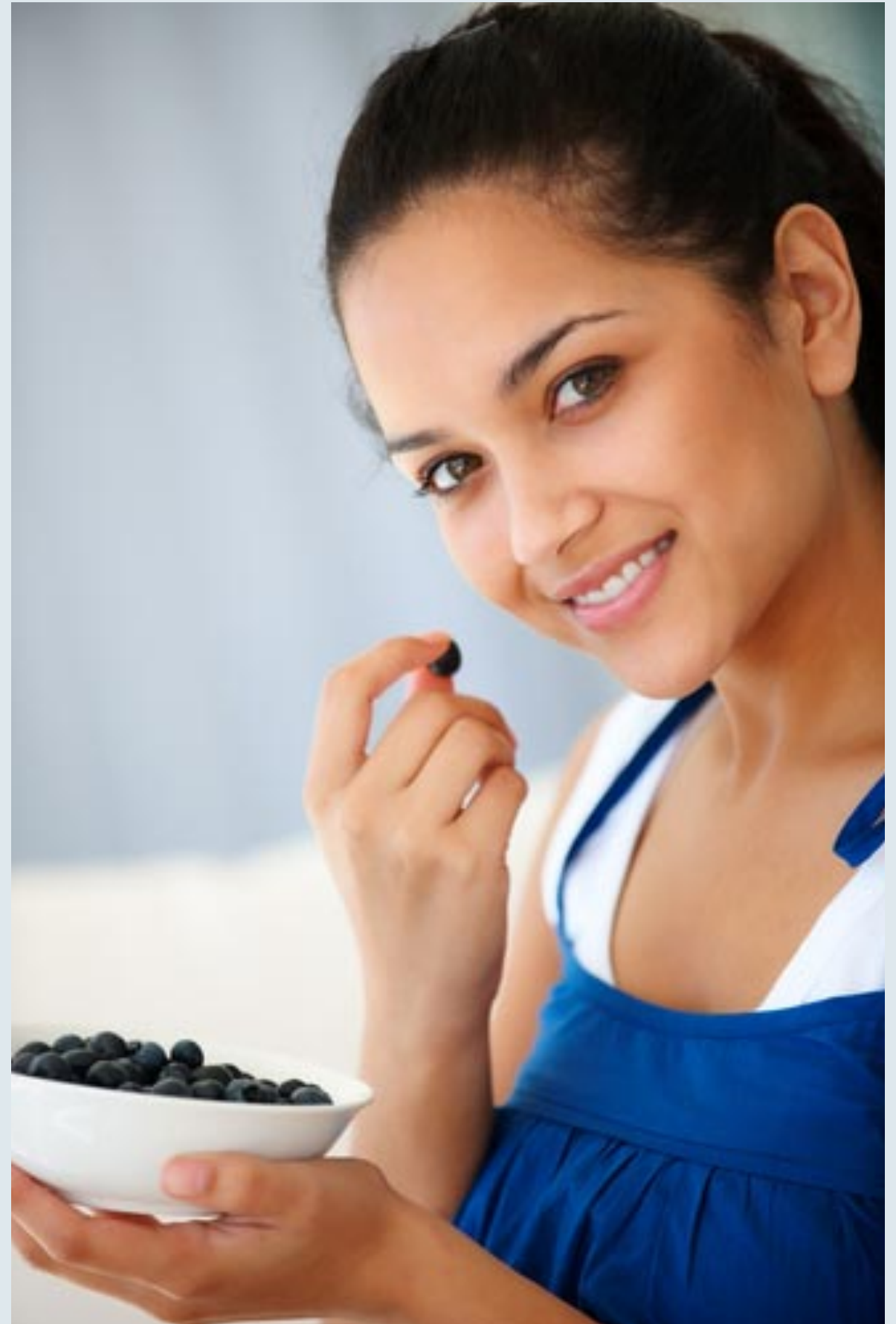
Take time out daily/weekly to tank up on your own oxygen and energy supply.

You will find that you can take much more and give much more.

Notes & Reflections

Lesson 2: Eat to live, not live to eat

Cooking for a cancer patient can be far more challenging than many books indicate. Sometimes it can take over your life and make you wonder if this is all you are now going to do.



Don't Get me Wrong, Diet is Important

Diet is a big deal and everyone says diet can make or break you. It plays an important part in healing yet beyond a point, you can become obsessive and lose perspective.

Soon after Vijay's diagnosis, we received many well-meaning inputs from friends and well-wishers on what to eat. Further to this, Vijay himself spent many hours researching different diets for cancer. He loves his food and eating the right food that was also palatable and tasty became very important for him. Dealing, as he was, with loss on many levels, he was keen to find a way where he could still enjoy his food in a healthy and therapeutic way.

But How Much is Too Much?

Matters came to a head when Vijay went to our Ayurvedic doctor friend to ask for a diet that would keep his immunity up and maintain his state of health. The doctor tested him on all the standard parameters: cholesterol, blood-sugar, his Vata-Pitta-Kapha (dosha) imbalance, etc. and prescribed a very specific and stringent diet. This was a challenge on many levels.

1. Vijay had to learn to like this new food on his plate

2. I had to find a interesting, innovative, creative way of serving it morning, noon and night (he gets bored so easily!)

3. My cook had to learn a whole new way of cooking. And even though getting help in India is easy, comparatively, training the help to the high and precise standards required is a real stretch.

And even though, Vijay was by now past the 5-year cancer-free mark, he was so committed to maintaining his optimum lifestyle regime to remain cancer-free that he felt this should become his life-long diet. Overnight, my kitchen and all its resources, my shopping list, my menu plans, everything started demanding 3-5 times more attention than before. It was as though I was being sucked into a vortex. The result was, at the end of three months, Vijay's Ayurvedic doctor was delighted and amazed that his dutiful patient had scored perfect scores on everything from cholesterol to sugar and all in between.

Significantly, that was also the day my cook quit her job because she fell violently sick, so stressed was she because of the exhaustion and inability to cope with this level of detail.

Finding Balance is Important

That's when I decided to take charge and find a way that would be realistic for everyone – one that would still give



Vijay a good diet, though not as stringent as the one described, and would be kinder to the rest of the family, so we too could eat what we enjoy. And for my cook (a new one this time!) to cook only one meal that everybody could eat.

Today, our breakfast is organic whole food: poha, dalia, red rice idlis and dosas, whole wheat bread, the occasional egg-white. Vijay starts his lunch and dinner with a big portion of fresh salad (with all the rainbow colours!) which forms the majority of his meal. Then he eats small portions of the rest of the meal cooked for the family, which has minimum oil, along with 2 chapatis (breads) made from high-fibre, multi-grain flour. He eats very little rice these days. Between meals, Vijay has freshly juiced fruits and vegetables as a mid-morning snack and green tea or Tulsi (Holy Basil) tea in the afternoons. (After attending a seminar on the vegan diet, he has also reduced milk and dairy products to a minimum too.)

Of course, since Vijay (and all of us are real ‘foodies’), this daily discipline allows him to indulge once in a while, without any guilt. Being virtuous but miserable isn’t a good idea either!

I’m happy to report that this dietary ‘compromise’ works for him and the whole family now; his health indicators continue to be in the healthy range.

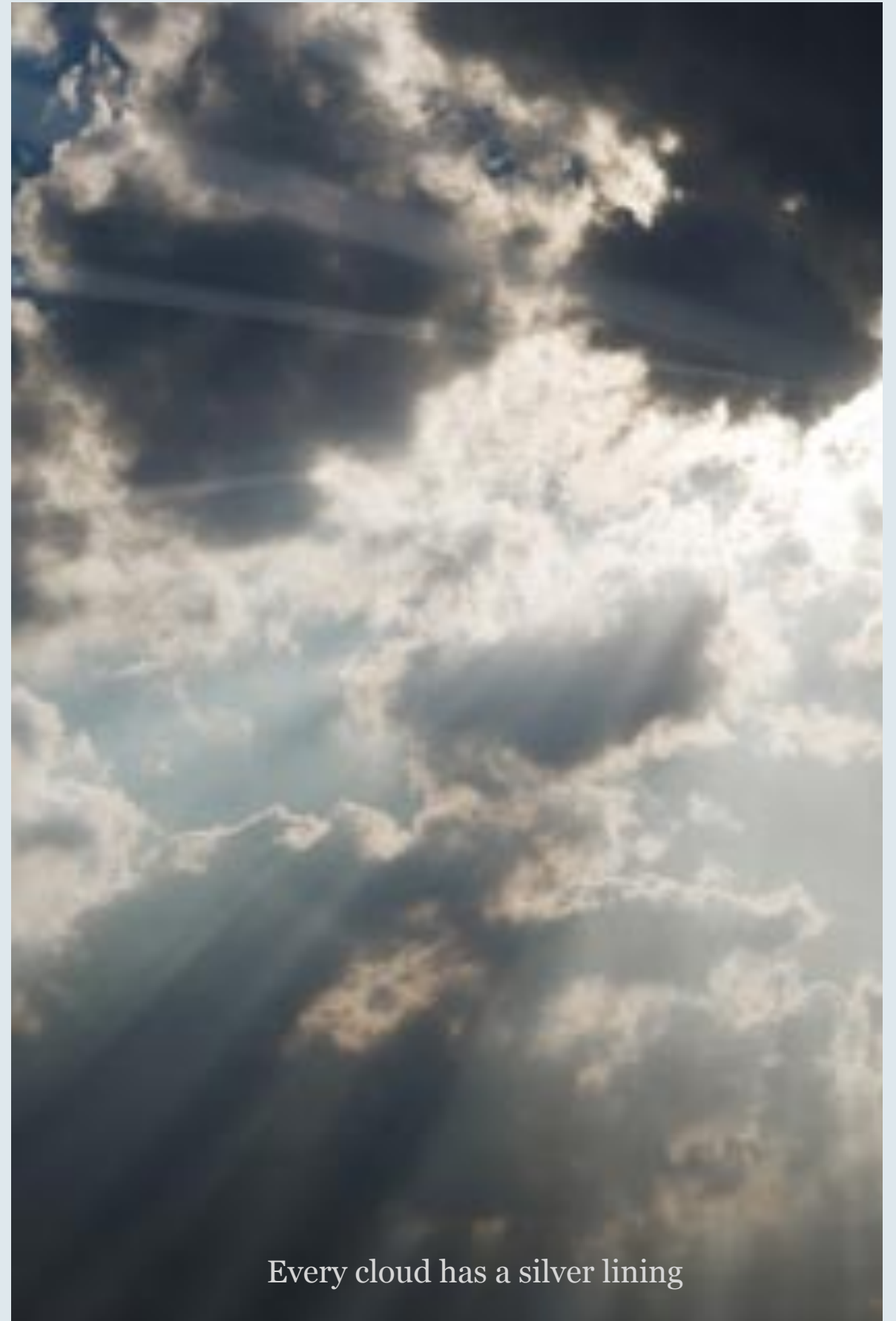
Whether it is diet or another life-style aspect, my message to other care-givers is to experiment and find a way that is do-able and does not exhaust you or stretch your limited resources.

While cancer requires us to make fundamental changes, remember that each individual’s needs are different and that a holistic, balanced approach is probably your best answer to sustain these changes over a period of time.

Notes and Reflections

Lesson 3: Acknowledge and Accept the Struggle

Another unexpected aspect of the cancer journey is when you come up against your own, not-so-heroic side, and that of the loved one you are taking care of.



Every cloud has a silver lining

On the other hand, human nature being equally good, true and beautiful, the cancer journey also can bring out the very best in us. Vijay and I have gone from one extreme to the other often over the last 8-9 years.

The bad news: You probably haven't experienced so much pain before

The cancer patient is dealing with intense emotional and mental turmoil, well beyond what the average person would deal with, in an entire lifetime. While we are preoccupied with doctor's appointments, surgery and post surgical rehab, chemo and radio cycles, the 'human' inside the body is equally assailed by psychological challenges. Addressing difficult questions around financial security and the loss of their own dreams, in addition to the real possibility of their death can make them self-absorbed, withdrawn and emotionally unavailable to you. Worse, they can lash out at you, as perhaps their only safe space in which to vent their pain and anguish. It will take all your love, courage, forbearance and compassion to live through this phase.

The good news: Ask and you shall receive

To keep my sanity and find ways to cope, given that my own anchor (Vijay) was no longer there for me, I reached out for answers and strategies. It is said "the universe is a benign place, so seek and you shall find", and when I did, I found myself swept away in a cloud-burst of Grace.



- I found myself at workshops where I learned energy healing, unconditional love and forgiveness techniques.
- I found a yoga teacher with whose personal help and attention, I connected with my very soul, while bringing my body to a state of perfect fitness and strength.
- I found the spiritual teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and a path to Grace, which has stayed with me ever since, and only deepens by the day.

Friends: the other kind of life-support

Through these workshops, I met and made lifelong friends, each a gem, a spiritual seeker and an exceptional human being from whom I learned things that nurtured me and developed me. It's as if the path of pain led to discovering real friends even as the superficial acquaintances fell away and no longer occupied my life. Through these friends came books, in an uncanny sequence that seemed to lead perfectly from one necessary life-supporting lesson to the next.

Looking back, that very painful time where my loved one wasn't available to me was also the time when I found some of the richest materials, learning and friends. The clichéd saying definitely holds true – no pain, no gain.

Acknowledging your own needs and humanness goes a long way to find your inner strength and there is nothing wrong in reaching out for help and support. If you are a carer, ask yourself: "What resources do I need to take me through this difficult time" and just send out a sincere call to the Divine.

"Every prayer is answered, every call is met" – The Mother, Sri Aurobindo

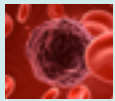
Notes and Reflections

Published eBooks

(as of September 2012.)



How Cancer
Awakens Us



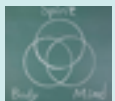
Cancer Basics



Supplementing Cancer
Therapy Part 1



Supplementing Cancer
Therapy Part 2



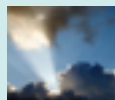
Supplementing Cancer
Therapy Part 3



Stress &
Cancer



Immunity &
Cancer



Cancer Thrivers -
Part 1



Cancer Thrivers -
Part 2



Tips for Caregivers -
Part 1



Tips for Caregivers -
Part 2

CONTACT

cancerawakens@gmail.com

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