

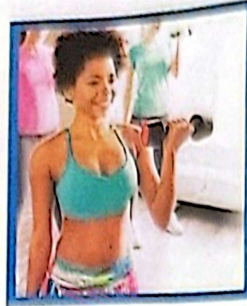
1

Eat lots of vegetables that are vital in the healing process and generally nutritious. Meat should be eaten once in a while



2

Start with light exercises that your body can handle. Exercise helps survivors keep fit and mentally strong



3

Cancer survivors should ensure they drink fresh juice instead of processed one deemed unhealthy



BREAST CANCER: How Okello took her power back

By Jacky Achan

Former teacher Margaret Okello was diagnosed with stage two breast cancer in 2007. The diagnosis came as a shock because she had not felt sick and only went to hospital for a check-up because she felt a swelling on her right breast.

Okello could not believe the diagnosis and went back to confirm with the doctor. But it was discovered that both breasts had cancer cells and had to be removed.

Okello endured seven rounds of chemotherapy, surgery and five weeks of daily radiation treatment to kill any cancer cells in her body. She also had to take hormonal drugs for five years, before she was declared cancer-free.

Life after cancer

After surgery, Okello did not like her appearance. For a long while, she did not want to look at herself in the mirror.

But it took courage and acceptance to see what she had become – a woman with no breasts. She had to resort to wearing artificial breasts.

The encouragement and acceptance by her husband who was just grateful she was alive, also helped her accept her scars.

Caution

As per her doctor's advice, Okello has been going for a cancer check-up annually. As doctors explain, this is important because cancer may recur or another form of cancer might develop, which is common among cancer survivors.

Okello says whenever she feels unwell, she immediately seeks medical care.

"I have been able to cope with life because I am spiritually strong. I also keep myself busy by offering free counselling services to patients at the Uganda Cancer Institute and run a business," she says.

Cancer Survivors Day

Yesterday, the world came together to mark Cancer Survivors Day. The day, which is marked annually on the first Sunday of June, aims at highlighting the challenges that cancer survivors have to



Margaret Okello had a double mastectomy and is now eating healthy and exercising

Early diagnosis will save you

Dr Fred Okuku, a consultant oncologist at the Uganda Cancer Institute at Mulago, says today they are seeing more cancer survivors.

He says cancer awareness is improving and people are getting to embrace screening especially for cervix, breast and prostate cancer. This means the conditions can be diagnosed early, thus early initiation on treatment and higher chances of survival.

Unfortunately, Okuku, adds that many cases of cancer still get diagnosed late. He advises the general public to go for screening so as to detect any form of

cancer early and have it treated.

Okello, who is the head of Uganda Cancer Society Patient Support committee, says cancer can never leave you the same but, says with early checks and treatment you can survive it.

For Okello, she knows at the back of her mind just like any cancer survivor knows that she can have the cancer resurface either the same type or another but, she tries not to think about it.

"When it comes, it will cross my mind but, for now I'm living my life," she says.

deal with and the possible ways to address them.

For Okello's case, apart from the psychological challenges of having her breasts cut off, she says she had to deal with several other challenges like nutrition.

Choice of food

Okello ensures that she eats healthy. "I was told that eating a lot of fat, sugar and carbohydrates are not good for people like me who have

survived cancer because we can easily gain weight, which is not good. I eat a lot of fruits and vegetables," she says.

Okello says she was advised to ensure she eats a balanced diet, including meat, but in moderation.

"Every food has nutritional value for the body. So, if you feel like eating meat do it once in a while. Just don't roast it. If it is unavoidable, eat just a piece. However, it is best to boil and eat just two

pieces," she says. "Once in a while, I also eat a little ice cream and chocolate," Okello adds.

She says natural juice is good for the body as opposed to processed ones.

"I believe in eating everything, but eating just enough portions that will not bring harm to the body. So one can cut out a lot of fat, sugar and carbohydrates, but eat the rest of the food," she says.

Coping psychologically

Patrick Tayebwa, a counsellor based in Entebbe, says cancer survivors who lose breasts, the prostate or any other body part of their bodies during treatment, suffer psychologically.

He says they experience loss, just like people who have lost loved ones.

"They go through the stage of denial and anger, which is normal. Survivors must allow themselves to go through this process.

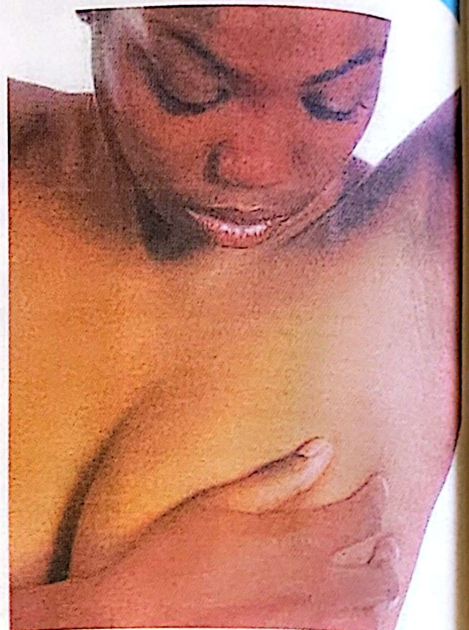


Cancer survivors often suffer from depression

"But after this stage, you must reach a point of acceptance and come to the way you are, scars and all," he says.

Tayebwa says one must not be stuck at one stage, for example, the stage of anger alone, as it may lead to depression, hopelessness and even death.

He says it is important that family gets cancer survivors' counselling either from a professional or through friends to help them in the recovery process.



Be vigilant. Check your breasts for any lumps regularly

Exercising

Okello says exercising and maintaining an active lifestyle is advised so as to keep the body active.

She says this helps curb a

recurrence of cancer. "However, you should not do exercises that strain your body," she says. Okello takes brisk walks to avoid weight gain and keep her body in shape.