Tips for Living a Healthy Life With Ovarian Cancer

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Living With Ovarian Cancer: You're Still You

You don't look like yourself, you don't feel like yourself and lately, you haven't even been thinking like yourself. Ovarian cancer is doing its best to transform you into someone that you barely recognize. Maintaining your identity through the diagnosis, treatment and beyond is a challenge, but a challenge that proves very worthwhile.

Identity and self-worth are based one's self-image, and how they perceive others. You are a nurse, a wife, a sister, a friend, and an expectant mother, but ovarian cancer has distorted these roles. You are on leave from work, your relationships are suffering because you're tired and irritable and the prospect of motherhood has been jeopardized. Perhaps more than any other diagnosis, ovarian cancer attacks what it means to be a woman. There is hope and you will always be you.

Your New Normal: Tips for Living With Ovarian Cancer

The most rewarding paths are often the most difficult. The points below may seem difficult, but you are worth fighting for.

- **Acknowledge the loss.** Loss of life is not the only type of loss. Loss of health, loss of socialization, loss of financial security and lost hopes are common problems experienced by those with ovarian cancer. Make a list of what you've got to lose – it may help you focus.
- **Be vulnerable.** Being "strong" or "brave" may seem like the best idea, but if these are contrary to your true feelings they will only diminish your identity and sense of self-worth. Allow yourself the freedom to cry, yell, and breakdown. People do not expect you to be a robot, and so do not expect it from yourself.
- **Be selfish.** Though it has negative connotations, being selfish is a great way to maintain your self-esteem. Do the things that you like, go places you've wanted to go and be with people you want to be with. The special people in your life will understand your needs as long as you are able to communicate them effectively. Set aside days to take care of yourself, process your situation and prepare for what lies ahead.

- **Be aggressive.** Taking a "wait and see" approach with your mental health and self-worth is too great a risk. By the time you're thirsty, you have already become dehydrated - you may already be in the throws of depression before you notice the symptoms. Make a list of current support systems and find ways to use them effectively. Enlist people you trust to hold you accountable and keep you motivated. Try psychotherapy; a therapist can assess your symptoms, guide you through loss and help you to reaffirm your sense of self.
- **Find New Roads.** Flexibility is a crucial to self-esteem for women diagnose with ovarian cancer. As detrimental as losing your identity can be, becoming rigid and static with your sense of self can be even worse. You may not be physically or emotionally able to do things that you once did, and that is to be expected. If you can no longer jog – try yoga. You may not be the same person you were before - you might be better.

Conclusion

Ovarian cancer targets every aspect of who you are as a woman. Finding balance and employing moderation will help ensure that you can remain yourself.