Nutrition and diet are extremely important during all of the three stages of cancer survivorship.

**Stage 1: LIVING WITH CANCER**

Nutrition and diet concerns begin following the new diagnosis of cancer, when an oncologist is selected to manage cancer care.

**Good nutrition is imperative during cancer treatment.**
- As all cancer survivors know, cancer treatment can place a lot of nutritional demands on your body.
- The main nutritional goals during this time are to:
  - maintain a healthy body weight and
  - eat healthy foods that supply your body with
    - calories
    - nutrients for energy
    - repair
    - recovery
    - healing
- A healthy eating pattern such as the American Institute for Cancer Research’s New American Plate (http://www.aicr.org/new-american-plate/) that includes:
  - plenty of vegetables and fruit
  - moderate amounts of whole grains
  - plant protein sources like nuts, beans, lentils, tofu, and tempeh,
  - along with modest portions of fish, poultry, lean meats
  - non-fat or low-fat dairy foods is recommended

**Treatment side effects can affect eating habits and nutritional status**
- Loss of appetite is common in cancer patients and can lead to weight loss and undernutrition.
  - This can slow the body’s ability to heal, and severe malnutrition can interfere with proper functioning of the heart, liver, kidneys, and immune system.
  - A number of recommendations for improving appetite and maintaining nutritional status during cancer treatment are found in the AICR/Livestrong Booklet - Heal Well.
  - This guide to healthy living and activity addresses specific advice on how to deal with nausea and vomiting, fatigue, bowel changes, changes in taste and smell, sore mouth or throat, unwanted weight gain, as well as low white blood counts and infections.
  - Food safety tips are also included especially for those times when white blood cells are low, and “safe food” is recommended.

During cancer treatment, experts suggest that dietary supplements not be used to replace nutrient-rich foods in the diet and are not recommended for cancer prevention.
- You must also review all supplement use with your health care team and they may prescribe specific dietary supplements for medical conditions such as osteoporosis or iron-deficiency anemia.
- Supplements should be always be supervised and directed by your health care team.
- Physical activity may be important in managing cancer treatment side effects as well as through all the stages of survivorship and will be discussed more extensively in a separate targeted message to WTCSN members.

**Stage 2: LIVING THROUGH CANCER**

Nutrition and diet issues continue after the primary curative treatment ends when most cancer survivors transfer to the recovery phase of survivorship.

The AICR guidelines for cancer prevention have also been recommended for cancer survivors for reducing risk of more cancer.
- It is of highest importance that cancer survivors maintain a healthy weight - and to be as lean as possible without being underweight.
Nutrition and Diet in Cancer Survivors

- Healthy weight status establishes an “anti-cancer” environment that discourages cancer growth.
- Evidence also suggests that dietary patterns that emphasize plant-based foods promote health and may reduce cancer risk for survivors.
- In addition to physical activity, which will be addressed separately as mentioned, cancer survivors should limit consumption of cooked red meat to less than 3 4-6 oz. servings per week while avoiding processed meats, so should try to have meatless meals several times a week.
- It is also recommended that cancer survivors should not consume alcohol, but if they choose to, should limit alcohol consumption to one drink per day for women and two for men.
- Another recommendation for long term cancer survival is to avoid sugary drinks and energy-dense foods, which would include many fast foods and food with added fat and sugar.
- Prepared baked goods, desserts and sweets, hamburgers, hotdogs, French fries, corn chips and potato chips are also high energy density foods that should be avoided.
- Cancer survivors should also not use tobacco products in any form and limit consumption of salty foods and those processed with a lot of salt (sodium).
- Although many cancer survivors choose to take a lot of over-the-counter herbal and vitamin preparations, they should instead aim to meet their nutritional needs through diet alone rather than taking supplements.

Stage 3: LIVING BEYOND CANCER
Nutrition and diet issues continue to be addressed during long-term survivorship (the last stage) of living beyond cancer, which can be both stressful, as well as, hopeful, as cancer survivors find a “new normal.”

Nutritional management during cancer survivorship and beyond continues to be important because diet and lifestyle choices may reduce the risk of cancer recurrence.

- There are no guarantees that if you pursue a healthy diet, and physical activity your cancer will not recur, but there are results from recent population studies that show health benefits for cancer survivors who maintain a healthy weight, follow a healthy diet, and engage in physical activity.

We at the West Texas Cancer Survivors Network think that nutrition is one of the most important components of lifestyle in surviving and living with cancer as well as preventing its recurrence.

Prevention diet for all stages of cancer survivorship is recommended:

Body Weight be as lean as possible without being underweight which establishes an “anti-cancer” environment

Eat a Plant-based Diet consume 2/3 of meals from plant based foods to promote health and which may reduce cancer risk for survivors

Limit Consumption of Cooked Red Meat to no more than three 4-6 oz. servings per week to improve overall health for cancer survivors who are at greater risk of chronic disease

Processed Meats avoid bacon, sausage, ham, and luncheon meats all together to reduce risk

Limit Alcoholic Beverages best to avoid even small amounts of alcohol- but no more than daily consumption of 1 drink for women and 2 drinks for men

Avoid Sugary Drinks and Energy-dense Foods associated with weight gain, overweight, and obesity

Limit Consumption of Salty Foods and Foods Processed with Salt (Sodium) associated with processed, prepared foods, fat foods, restaurants which affects overall health and risk of stomach cancer

Additional West Texas Cancer Survivors Network Fact Sheets will address strategies for

- SURVIVORSHIP CARE PLANS
- MAINTAINING HEALTHY WEIGHT
- QUALITY OF LIFE
- PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

References:
www.aicr.org

Most statements in this article are taken from the booklet HEAL Well: A Cancer Nutrition Guide, which was created through a joint project of the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR), the LIVESTRONG Foundation, and Meals to Heal. This is available from the American Institute for Cancer Research at: http://www.aicr.org/patients-survivors/ as a PDF.