

[TRACK 6: SURVIVOR STORIES: COMPLEMENTARY THERAPY]

Bill, 67 years old

[Narrator]

Whether or not you are currently considering using complementary therapy, let's look at the example of another cancer survivor to illustrate how to make decisions about complementary therapies. Bill is 67 years old. He had had surgery for early stage colon cancer several years ago and now his cancer has returned. He is of German descent, a retired electrical engineer, and has been married for 35 years to his wife Nicole. Bill and his wife have four adult children and three grandchildren who live in other parts of the country.

[Bill]

I've spent my retirement years with my wife, Nicole, sailing and fishing on our boat. I'm used to being in control of my life, taking charge at work and at home. I'm really upset that my cancer has returned, especially because my current treatment options don't seem like they will help me much. The truth is that my chances for long-term survival are pretty low. I don't see why I should start chemotherapy -- the side effects could make me a burden to my wife. I couldn't stand that. There has to be some other way to treat my cancer.

[Bill]

I recently heard some of my friends talking about the healing effects of what they called "complementary" and "alternative" therapies. I searched the Internet for more information, to see if I should give any of these therapies a try. I talked with an herbalist, an alternative nutritionist, and a therapist. I'm not sure if these therapies will help me, but I want to make sure I am looking at all of the options. It looks like I could go with standard therapy, alternative therapy, or a mix of either with complementary therapy. The complementary and alternative therapies may cost hundreds of dollars a month, but they might be better for my particular situation than just standard therapy. I don't want to have standard therapy again, but I don't want to do nothing.

[Narrator]

What do you think you would do in this situation? How would you decide? Now, let's do another exercise to examine whether complementary or alternative therapies might be a good choice for you. Go back to your list of "Pros and Cons" about the possibility of taking part in a clinical trial. On the back of that piece of paper, write down your thoughts and feelings about standard cancer therapies for cancer that returns, called recurrent cancer. What is your attitude about treatment for recurrent cancer? Do you think complementary or alternative therapies should be included in your treatment? Or do you think standard therapy alone is the best option in your situation? Now, draw a line down the middle of the paper to make two columns, one for standard therapy and one for complementary or alternative therapy. Listen carefully to the following nine questions, stop the audio program and think about them. Write down your answers, whether "Yes", "No", or other short answers as we go along.

- First question: think carefully at the suggestions and advice given by people who practice complementary or alternative therapies. Do they have information to back up their claims or do they only tell you about their success stories?

- Second question: Have any recognized medical authorities endorsed these stories about complementary or alternative therapies?
- Question 3: Do the alternative practitioners sell the products that they endorse?
- Question 4: Is the product only available through the alternative practitioner?
- Question 5: Plan out the schedule of vitamins/treatments/nutritional or other interventions that are recommended. Will this schedule fit into your daily lifestyle or will it force you to completely change your daily life?
- Question 6: How much will your complementary or alternative therapy cost?
- Question 7: Who will pay for these therapies?
- Question 8: How long will you be able to cover the costs by yourself, if you would have to do so?
- Question 9: Does the alternative approach cause any short- or long-term effects?

[Narrator]

If you cannot answer all of these questions, you need more information. If you have not already listened to the Cancer Survival Toolbox program entitled "Finding Information," you should. That program discusses many different ways to get the information you need to help you make important decisions. For example, you can search the Internet to see if there are any trials on the therapies you are thinking about trying. Then, if you decide to try complementary or alternative therapies, try one therapy at a time rather than starting them all at once. Take things step-by-step. Remember that you can change your mind at any time about using alternative therapy.