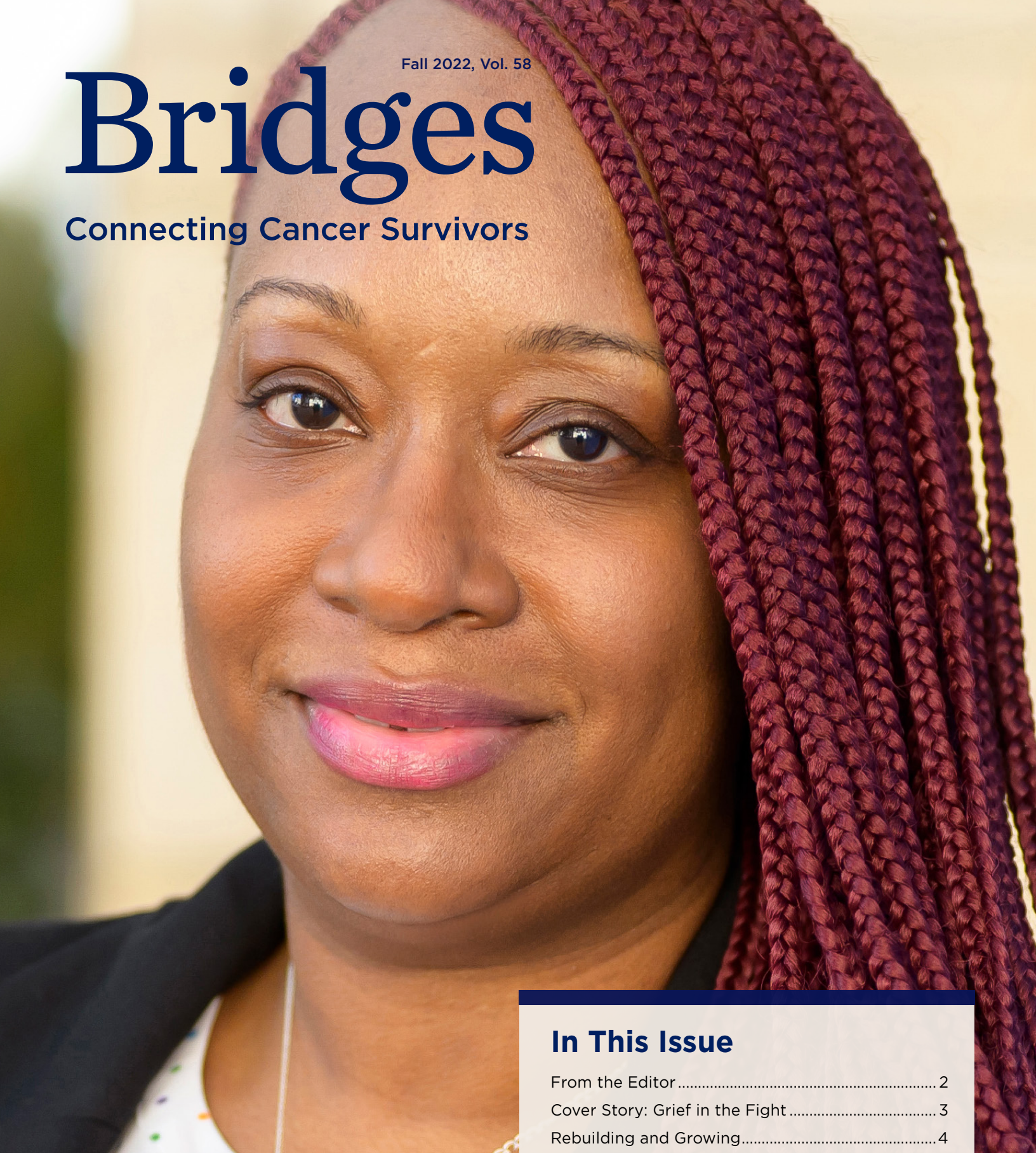


Fall 2022, Vol. 58

Bridges

Connecting Cancer Survivors



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Memorial Sloan Kettering
Cancer Center

From the Editor

By Eileen F. Gould



Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSK) celebrated National Cancer Survivorship Month in June. More than 500 attendees joined the annual Survivorship Celebration this year, held online for the second year in a row. It is a time

for those living with and beyond cancer, their families and friends, and

our community members to come together and reflect on their experiences in the World of Cancer.

Stacie Corcoran, Director of the Adult Survivorship Program, opened the event, followed by a warm welcome and reflections from Craig B. Thompson, President and Chief Executive Officer, and Lisa DeAngelis, Physician-in-Chief and Chief Medical Officer.

This year's format was refreshingly different, featuring a panel moderated by Corcoran that highlighted both clinician and patient perspectives on the experience of cancer through a post-treatment setting. There were two survivor panelists, Michelle Anderson-Benjamin and Suzette

Simon, as well as two clinicians, breast medical oncologist Neil Iyengar and Survivorship nurse practitioner Kate Keenan. Michelle is featured in this issue of *Bridges* as both a breast cancer survivor and an MSK employee; Suzette is featured in the *Bridges* summer 2022 newsletter, sharing her story as a breast cancer survivor and comedian. All the panelists offered insight into treatment and beyond, their sources of strength and resilience, how to manage fears of recurrence, healthy living resources, and more.

The hour-long program concluded with presentations by representatives from various MSK services that focus on patients and caregivers, including the MSK *Bridges Newsletter*, *Resources for Life After Cancer*, the Patient and Caregiver Peer Support Program, the Integrative Medicine Department, and MSK Giving.

Whether we come together in person or online, it is a celebratory event that we in the MSK community look forward to each year!

If you would like to share your story or receive an email copy of *Bridges*, please visit www.mskcc.org/bridges. *Bridges* is now printed on recycled paper and, as always, is available online.



(Clockwise from top left) Stacie Corcoran, Michelle Anderson-Benjamin, Suzette Simon, Kate Keenan, and Dr. Neil Iyengar at the online annual Survivorship Celebration in June.

A recording of the online event can be viewed at giving.mskcc.org/survivorship-celebration.

Grief in the Fight

By Michelle Anderson-Benjamin, MHA

“In life, you can’t control what happens; you can only control your reaction.”

— Michael Anderson Sr.



Michelle is a two-time Breast Cancer Warrior and resides in New York City with her husband and two children. She has been a Care Coordinator at MSK for the past six years and is an advocate, a mentor, and a member of several cancer organizations, including The Fearless Warrior Project, which she founded. Michelle is also a certified mental health coach and an advocate who focuses on helping others address their mental and emotional health. Additionally, she is a volunteer for the Patient and Caregiver Volunteer Program at MSK.

Who would have thought that *this* would be my story? Who would have thought that within one year I would be diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of 36 and have 6 surgeries and 15 rounds of chemotherapy? In 2020, during a pandemic, while dealing with remote learning for a teen and toddler, and being a healthcare worker, the last thing I expected to be added to my plate was fighting for my life. I've always tried to see the positive in everything, but this experience challenged my faith and mindset. From the outside, no one would ever think this would be my story. However, it is my reality.

At a time when most would expect me to have a breakdown, I chose to use my story to inspire others. Hearing the words “you have cancer” triggers so many emotions and fears. Without a supportive village, a person could fall into a deep depression. I was blessed enough to not only have a strong village but also a medical team, co-workers, and a community that supported, pushed, and motivated me to fight. Unfortunately, my biggest supporter, my dad, passed away a few months after I completed chemotherapy. He wanted me to focus on my own recovery and not worry about his suffering. Despite dealing with my own illness, it was an honor to hold my father’s hand during his last moments and hear him tell me how proud he was of me. Losing a parent while fighting for my life not only empowered me but also gave me purpose and understanding that my journey is bigger than me.

My father was my world — my mentor and superhero. He taught me the meaning of self-confidence, self-worth, believing in yourself, and loving yourself unconditionally. Grief creates many emotions, and if unexpressed, those feelings can become baggage to the person carrying them around. It is important to channel and address your emotions, especially when dealing with any illness. My dad’s passing inspired me to become an advocate and supporter of others. The truth is, the world does not stop because you have an illness. Life continues, but you are still in a position of power through your choices. The decision is yours regarding how you move forward.

I know my story has purpose; my pain is a healing for not just myself but also for others. I encourage everyone to find their purpose because there are many things in life we can’t control, but we can control our reaction.

Rebuilding and Growing

By Jim Brown

Jim has been an educational consultant the past 12 years, which was a big change after being a teacher and school leader in private schools for 20 years. Married with three children, he enjoys exploring different places and people with family and helping families determine good school environments to help their children flourish.



I looked up “rebuilding resiliency” on Google, and it took me directly to an article about Superstorm Sandy and rebuilding of parts of New York City. The focus was primarily on the city’s efforts to rebuild the infrastructure of many of the buildings, roads, and other communal structures. The new materials and design highlighted the stronger, more aesthetic outcomes.

While my journey overcoming cancer for the past six years is not quite like a storm that rushed through and created significant damage all at once, it did, however, cause a mess — not only with my body but my mind, too. Now it means I need a lot of care, know-how, and focus to rebuild after a diagnosis, several treatments, and numerous drawbacks that brought fear, panic, depression, and pain over and over again. I have tried to stay positive and do what my MSK doctors asked of me, but I know there were many occasions I needed some prodding, reminders, and gentle

soothing from my family, especially my wife.

The worst seems mostly over with, but the periodic reminders of flare-ups and the regular maintenance necessary to make sure all remains under control serve as the occasional wake-up calls to stay vigilant. My attention and efforts now are mostly focused on rebuilding myself — and, hopefully, better than I once was. The success of all the care I received and continue to receive are gifts.

My desire to do better — be better — is at the forefront of my mind. I am not interested in going back to the old me; I can’t.

But I don’t look back on my life and regret my circumstances and the

choices I made over the years. I had a good run. My hope is now to take full advantage of the opportunity I have been given, to live once again. This time, I want the best materials I can find and the best engineering available, and I will put in the necessary time, energy, and focus required to create my best self.

I believe I have a responsibility to do so. I have been given a significant amount of resources and an unfathomable amount of love and care to keep me moving forward to safety through this illness. And I know there were many people before me who suffered far greater than me. They helped get the level of care I now benefit from better than they had the opportunity to receive.

I am fully aware there are others around me who have not had the same opportunities of care, with devastating results. Thank you, MSK; I know I am a lucky one. So I believe I have to forge forward with only my best efforts.

Ask the Professional

Eating Well Beyond Your Cancer Journey

By Karla Giboyeaux, MA, RDN, CDN

There's a lot of conflicting information about nutrition everywhere. It can sometimes be overwhelming and confusing for all of us. As an oncology dietitian, patients often ask questions like: "Is sugar the bad guy?" "What about soy and meat — will these affect my cancer?" These questions are valid as these foods have a bad reputation mostly rooted on myths and unhelpful information. While it is safe to consume them, it is important to understand where these myths are coming from and the best way to incorporate them within a healthy lifestyle.

Will eating sugar make my cancer grow or increase risks?

Research shows that consumption of sugar does not directly influence cancer or increase cancer risk. However, excessive consumption of added sugars and refined carbohydrates can cause weight gain. And there is evidence showing that excessive body weight increases risks for cancer and other chronic conditions. If used sensibly, sweeteners can be useful to add flavor to healthy meals and help someone in treatment who is struggling with side effects, such as taste changes or low appetite.

What should I know about soy?

If you are a breast cancer survivor, perhaps you've heard that soy may increase risk for breast cancer because of its similarities to the hormone estrogen. This can be a reason of concern for patients diagnosed with estrogen receptor-positive breast cancer, a type of cancer that uses estrogen to grow. The American Institute for Cancer Research reported consistent findings from population studies

indicating no increased risk for breast cancer survivors who consume soy-based foods. When consuming in moderation, soy-based foods such as soy milk, tofu, and edamame are a great way to add protein to your meals, even for those patients on cancer treatment.

Do I have to stop eating meat to prevent cancer?

There is convincing evidence reporting that excessive consumption of red meats such as beef, pork, and lamb increases risk of colorectal cancer. However, if you are a meat eater, this doesn't mean you have to stop eating red meat completely, but cutting down consumption will certainly benefit your health. The limit recommended is less than three portions per week, about 12 to 18 ounces or less a week.

What do you recommend for a healthy lifestyle after a cancer diagnosis?

To stay healthy during and after cancer treatment, it is a good idea to look at your eating behaviors and lifestyle and become conscious about what habits need to change. Incorporating regular exercise; consuming fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, and legumes regularly; avoiding alcohol and smoking; and maintaining a healthy weight are proven recommendations that reduce risks for cancer and chronic conditions such as diabetes and heart disease.

What resources are available at the MSK Ralph Lauren Center?

- At the MSK Ralph Lauren Center, we provide individualized nutrition counseling helping each patient with specific goals before, during, and after cancer treatment. Also, we work with patients who don't



Karla Giboyeaux is a clinical dietitian at MSK Ralph Lauren Center and works in the cancer treatment and prevention community setting. Karla has a strong interest and background in culinary arts, and her focus is to help patients modify their favorite meals and inspire them to cook more healthy meals at home.

necessarily have a cancer diagnosis but need to get to a healthier weight; manage their diabetes, cholesterol, or high blood pressure; or would like to improve their diet for prevention.

- In conjunction with the Immigrant Health and Counseling Center, we also offer a medically tailored food pantry that helps patients in treatment who express difficulty getting the food they need.
- You can also cook with me at our monthly virtual nutrition and healthy cooking workshop, called "Cooking With Karla," where I demonstrate affordable, easy, and delicious recipes, and we discuss different topics about nutrition and healthy lifestyle.

To register for our next "Cooking With Karla" online workshop, you can go to: www.mskcc.org/events. Search "Karla" for upcoming cooking workshops.

If you are interested in making an appointment with a nutritionist at the MSK Ralph Lauren Center or for more information about the food pantry, please call **212-987-1777**.

Surviving Cancer To Pursue a Meaningful Life

By Paul J. Sutton

As I approach 83 years of age, I find myself thinking about the people and events that have had an impact upon my life. Dealing with cancer is at or near the top of the list.

I am a patent attorney with advanced degrees, first in engineering and thereafter in law. I am still actively engaged in the practice of patent law with a wonderful partner of 50 years. My most-talked-about accomplishment as a mechanical design engineer (before transitioning from engineering to law) is my contribution to the design of the third-stage booster rocket structure that carried the first astronauts to the moon.

It was on a morning of January 2011 that, while shaving, I noticed a slight swelling in my neck. A biopsy confirmed that I had stage 4 throat cancer. Under the wonderful care of my doctors and their nurses, I began what would be two regimens of chemotherapy and 35 radiation treatments. During the course of my treatment, I was hospitalized with a bout of pneumonia, I had a food tube inserted, and I was given drugs that eliminated nausea.

Throughout this treatment period and since, my wife, daughter, and son have always been by my side, physically and emotionally. Periodic visits to Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSK) doctors for checkups confirm that the cancer has not returned. I take nothing for granted. Yes, there have been side effects from the radiation treatments that are at times challenging. These include impacts upon swallowing, dry mouth, changes in my ability to smell and taste, and inner ear issues affecting balance.

With my technical background, I benefit from a firsthand understanding of the newest advances that have given people with cancer highly effective

chemotherapy drugs, advanced radiation-focused mapping, and tools to treat and cure pneumonia and pain.

It will be strange to some when I say that my MSK experiences during my cancer treatments have been truly wonderful. Some have asked me how treatments for cancer can be wonderful. I have never felt alone or neglected. The MSK doctors and staff have always been honest and straightforward in discussing my situation with me. They were responsive to my claustrophobia by changing the design of the mask worn over the face during radiation, so that today's patients will benefit from this change.

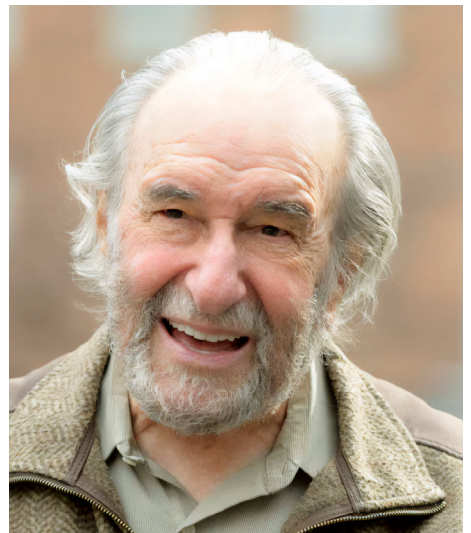
And “my club”... While in the reception area, waiting my turn to receive radiation, my eyes have naturally met others'. Without a word being uttered, simple nods or smiles have indicated that we were loving members of a club that would forever join us.

Of course, we never asked to be members of this club. But our brief collective experience on those days exchanged unique forms of comfort for one another. We felt lucky to be in one another's company during those brief encounters. Those of us who are fortunate enough to be survivors are able to expand the reach of that club. My spirits are lifted when I think about my fellow club members. And my heart goes out to the families whose loss is unimaginable.

There are no menial jobs at MSK to take for granted. We are greeted with smiles from those who

empty trash bins, the people who shepherd patients from room to room, the garage attendants, the cafeteria workers who dish out and deliver meals, the security guards at entrances, and the countless volunteers relied upon. Volunteers have shared with me that cancer has visited their families and that they feel compelled to give back after being treated so well.

I am one lucky fellow! As a grateful survivor, snippets of my life experiences visit me most days. The importance of feeling and expressing gratitude to all who have accompanied me on this journey cannot be overstated. Other cancer patients who I've encountered while being treated have lifted my spirits. I am grateful that I have a loving family and that institutions such as MSK exist.



Paul J. Sutton is an 82-year-old practicing patent attorney with both engineering and law degrees. As a design engineer, before transitioning from engineering to law, Paul was part of the Missiles and Space Systems team that designed the third-stage booster rocket that carried the first astronauts to the moon. A stage 4 throat cancer survivor, Paul regularly reaches out to other survivors to share experiences. Paul's wife of 52 years, two grown children, and two grandchildren are the loves of his life.

Dietary Supplements in Cancer Care

By Lillian Rodich, PA-C, MSPAS, MPH; Jyothirmai Gubili, MS; and Yen Nien (Jason) Hou, PharmD, DiplOM, LAC

Each visit with the Department of Integrative Medicine is different, but nearly every patient has this question: “Should I be taking [this supplement] my friend/family member/co-worker suggested?” With so much information out there, it’s hard to know what sources to trust when deciding whether to take a supplement. Hopefully, we can help answer these questions and allow patients to make the best decisions for their health. Here, we’ll look at five supplements that are asked about most frequently: collagen, soy, turmeric, ashwagandha, and green tea.

You should check with your healthcare provider before consuming dietary supplements as they can cause side effects and interfere with prescription drugs that you may be taking. If you’d like to learn more about supplements, you can book a consultation with a member of MSK’s Integrative Medicine Service. Call **646-608-8550** for more information.

Collagen

Many patients inquire about collagen to help with hair and nail growth after treatment. There are numerous products now with added collagen, making this ingredient readily available. But how safe is it for cancer survivors? According to a study published in the *Lancet* journal in 2016, “Increased breast density attributed to collagen I deposition is associated with a four- to sixfold increased risk of developing breast cancer.” The issue at hand here is that we cannot choose where excess collagen will be deposited. There is no way to ensure that it will be absorbed into your skin, hair, and nails, while not contributing to tumor growth. Because of this risk, patients should instead be advised to consume foods rich in collagen — which is very bioavailable in items such as bone broth — allowing the body to absorb it quickly, as well as amino-acid-rich foods (such as eggs) and lean meats (like chicken and fish). These amino-acid-rich foods will help the body create collagen naturally in the body. Collagen supplements, on the other hand, are best avoided because they contain high amounts of collagen, which may contribute to tumor growth or help create an environment in the body in which tumor cells can grow more easily.

Soy

Another common concern is the intake of soy foods because of their phytoestrogenic effects. Phytoestrogens are plant compounds that can mimic estrogen, a hormone that helps develop and maintain the reproductive system in women. More clinical studies are needed to definitively show the effects of soy on hormone levels in humans. Taking in soy-containing foods in moderation is considered safe, but it is best to avoid supplements of concentrated soy, especially in patients with a history of an estrogen-positive tumor. Another important point to keep in mind: By the time a food has become soy milk or soy sauce, it’s relatively low in phytoestrogens compared with

whole soy foods, such as edamame or soy nuts. The bottom line for soy would be to avoid soy supplements for symptom relief but to allow the consumption of soy-containing foods in moderation as part of a diverse, healthy diet.

Turmeric

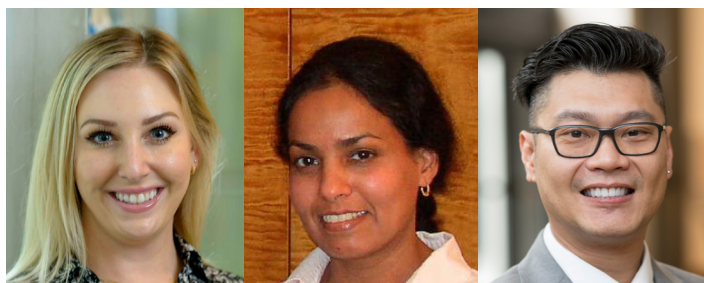
Turmeric is another supplement that patients often ask about. The active ingredient in turmeric is curcumin. It has been shown to have anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer effects and can also help reduce some side effects of cancer treatments. It is safe to add turmeric to foods (such as curries, stews, and milk), but too much turmeric or turmeric supplements can interfere with cancer treatments. They may also increase the risks of bleeding and kidney stones and cause stomachache.

Ashwagandha

Ashwagandha has recently become popular as a stress-relieving herb. More research is needed to conclusively show its benefits. Ashwagandha has been shown to be safe in healthy adults, but people with underlying disease or medical conditions should talk to their healthcare providers before taking it. Common side effects from taking ashwagandha include mild to moderate drowsiness that comes and goes, stomachaches, and diarrhea.

Green tea

Green tea is a beverage enjoyed by many around the globe. Major bioactive ingredients include not only caffeine but also the well-studied polyphenol antioxidant epigallocatechin-3-gallate (EGCG) and the amino acid L-theanine. Although listed as Generally Recognized as Safe (GRAS) by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), high-dose green tea extract can cause liver toxicity and may pose a risk for potential herb-drug interactions. However, 1 to 2 cups a day of good-quality green tea is generally safe and may be the key to a healthy life.



Lillian Rodich is a physician assistant in MSK’s Integrative Medicine Service. **Jyothirmai Gubili** is an editor in MSK’s Integrative Medicine Service. **Yen Nien (Jason) Hou** is the manager of the About Herbs website, developed and maintained by MSK’s Integrative Medicine Service.

MSK’s About Herbs database also provides objective, evidence-based information about 288 herbs, dietary supplements, and bogus cancer treatments.

www.aboutherbs.com

Where Are They Now?

By Alex Sepiol



I continue to enjoy retirement and have increased the amount of time I exercise. I now run 13 miles twice a week and work out each day. I continue to attend karate and have been promoted to Renshi, which is a fourth-degree black belt.

Since the pandemic, travel has been restricted. However, my wife, Michelle, and I recently went to Las Vegas to celebrate my 51st birthday in November 2021. On that trip, we did a tour of the Grand Canyon and the Hoover Dam. We also saw Sting in concert and saw a magic show by Matt Franco. We rode the High Roller Ferris wheel, which reached 550 feet and gave an incredible view of the skyline from above the city at night. We visited downtown Vegas and enjoyed the sights and sounds of Fremont Street. We took two cruises this year, one out of Bayonne, New

Jersey, to the Bahamas and the other out of Seattle to Alaska.

Now that I have more time, I also help do household chores, grocery shop, and cook. Last but not least, I continue to spend time with family and friends trying new restaurants. In December 2021, we spent a day in New York City with another couple, visiting the Christmas tree and went to the Top of the Rock for a beautiful view of the city at night. In addition, we also passed by the Vessel and Hudson Yards.

I continue to get MRIs every four months. I reached five years of clean scans in June 2022, and I will be six years from diagnosis in September 2022.

I continue to help support and provide hope to other glioblastoma patients by sharing my story with them.

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Patient and Caregiver Peer Support Program

The Patient and Caregiver Peer Support Program connects current patients and caregivers to volunteers who have experienced a similar diagnosis or circumstance related to cancer. If you are a patient at least one year from initial diagnosis or no longer a caregiver of someone in active treatment, please consider becoming a Patient or Caregiver Volunteer.

For more information, contact **212-639-5007** or patient2patient@mskcc.org

RLAC

Resources for Life After Cancer (RLAC) welcomes survivors to participate in programs that encourage healing through education and support to live well after cancer.

Please see the online calendar at: www.mskcc.org/SWcalendar

Scan the QR code to be directed to the *Bridges* website and find this issue online.



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