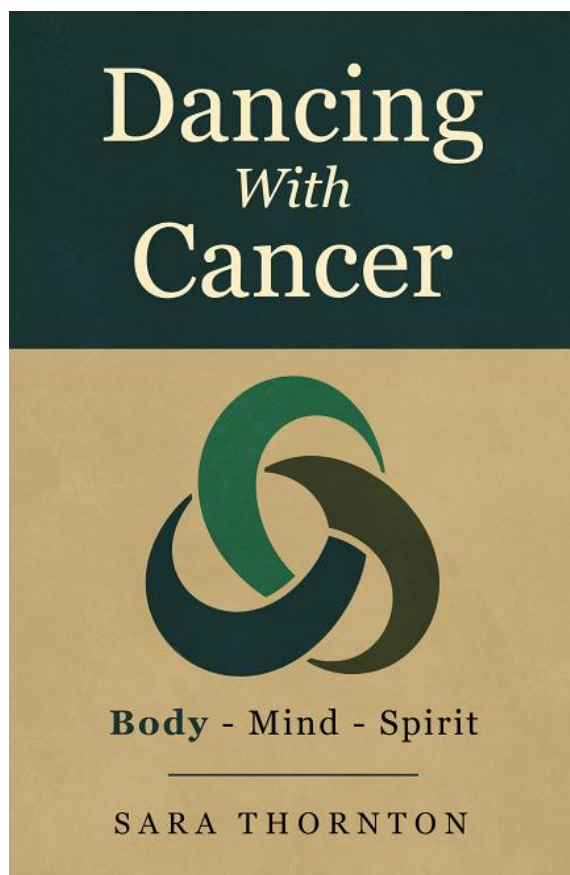




A clinical herbalist's experience integrating herbs and supplements with standard cancer treatments has become your pocket-guide to help yourself during and after treatments.

Dancing with Cancer: Body - Mind - Spirit
By Sara Thornton

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Dancing *With* Cancer



Body - Mind - Spirit

SARA THORNTON

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Introduction

Three Parts, One Book

This is Part One of a multi-part book. In order to get the information to you, my audience, quickly, efficiently, and in a logical order, I will be publishing *Dancing With Cancer* as at least two books. Possibly three, depending on how much of a geeked-up roll I achieve. Many of you will think, hah! The core of the book is the herbal supplements section. I can ignore the rest. Not so fast, my friend! Much of the more recent research shows that you exist as an intertwined composite of body, mind, and spirit, not three disparate pieces. Treating one part affects the other parts; ignoring one part will hinder or delay anything you are trying to do to the other parts. Thank you for buying Book 1 - Part 1! It offers plenty of good advice to get you through your treatments and beyond. Don't stop now, keep going for the complete experience. The next books are being organized and written as you read this. They too contain interesting nuggets you can use right away. Now, for some quick book descriptions:

Body - The book in your hands right now. It includes the complete list of the herbs, supplements, vitamins, etc. that I incorporated throughout my western medical treatments. I list each one, when I took it, and why. I also include studies, reports, monographs, etc. that back up why I was taking it. The herbal summary section breaks apart each stage of the western medical treatments and

what I took during each. I also list everything I am currently taking and why. I will give you enough information to continue your own research with legitimate, science-driven sites. In addition, you have a section on keeping costs down and how to make adding supplements more cost-effective. I even give you recipes to help incorporate the herbs and herbal supports without having to take yet another pill.

Mind & Spirit - This will be Part Two, the psychology, mindset, and lifestyle changes section. Whether or not you are religious has no bearing. To me, spirituality is looking outside yourself. I relate how I incorporated spirituality into my treatment program. I will share the books I used and how I modified them for my purposes. Some of the books I found were annoying but useful; I just ignored the irritating parts. The mindfulness and meditative practices came from an ordained interfaith minister who could mix neuroscience, physiology, and theology in the same conversation and produce practices that worked for my skeptical, science-driven brain.

You have half of the total book I have planned in your hand right now. If you choose to grab the supplement part only, then find your results are minimal, you missed the essential second phase. Healing really is an intertwined dance between body, mind, and spirit. Check in on the Facebook page for this book; it's Dancing with Cancer. I will be sharing some of the tips and practices I used. That should help you along the way.

In writing this book - *all* of its parts - I am not telling you how to do anything. No promises of cures, no magic potions or instant solutions. I offer what I did, how I did it, and what the results were for *me*. I was my own guinea pig, my own experimental subject. I hope you can find something that helps in some way.

The purpose of this book is not to diagnose, treat, or cure anything. It is only one woman's experience with one particular, unique to her, cancer diagnosis. Using experience, training, and research, I combined Western medicine with herbal supplements to get the best outcomes possible - *for myself*. My friends and family added spiritual aspects & healing modalities, plus large helpings of humor and sarcasm. It is my hope that you can glean something useful from my experience. Perhaps it can help you or a family member. At the very least, you can entertain yourself with this book and all its concomitant links, bibliography, and footnotes.

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Chapter One

Advocates: Friends, Family, YOU!

Most of the time, when people get a cancer diagnosis, a bureaucratic machine roars to life. The oncologist, medical group, or hospital sets the process in motion: financial counselling, your name into the scheduling queue for whatever tests and scans are necessary for treatments. Often, a nurse navigator is assigned to you. This navigator is supposed to help you figure out what you need to do and when. They have contact information for many different programs, from mental health to financial aid to supportive care like massage or reiki. They can explain what will happen and when. They can act as an intermediary if you have issues with a member of the team that forms to treat your cancer.

When I was scheduled for surgery, I was assigned a nurse navigator who was part of the medical group as well as a hospital employee. I had many questions. She answered them as best she could. Unfortunately, the information was not accurate at all. It was correct - for her situation. She told me what her stay at the same hospital was like a year or so prior. Mind you, *her stay*. For me, the hospital was both understaffed and overwhelmed by Covid. Ask questions but understand the limits the navigator may have. Some people get great comfort from their nurse navigators; some find them less than helpful.

An advocate is someone who can go with you to appointments and help you understand what is going on. You might need another explanation or someone to help you sort out the options. That person can also help interface with the doctor or tech. They can explain what your issues or problems are, or how a particular treatment affects you. I had advocates now and then when I got completely confused. I brought them along and they helped both the APRN and I understand each other. It was much smoother after. Advocates can also help you figure out test results. Often, the medicals (APRN, PA, doctors) have seen so many blood work panels or CAT scan readings that they may not slow down or might gloss over something that is alarming to you. Your advocate can help you read those results and ask particular questions.

The absolute best advocate of all is YOU. I acknowledge the many personality types who just wilt at the thought of pushing back with an authority figure. Buck up! This is YOUR life, YOUR decision. A medical degree and a white coat do not grant divinity. "The doctor" has no great authority over you. They do indeed have expertise that you very likely lack. You have bodily autonomy whether they like it or not. Speak up often. Make your medical team explain clearly what is going to happen, what you should expect, what are common issues. The nurse navigator can help advocate for you, but cannot go to appointments with you, nor can they read test results or scans. Sometimes s/he can explain what is going on, more often they refer you back to a team member in the doctor's office. You can also check into the complaint or mediation practices

available if you feel the doctor or team is not listening to or addressing your concerns. Many large medical groups and hospitals have mediator contacts when a patient is feeling bulldozed or is just plain confused.

That all said, a good oncologist will answer your questions without making you feel stupid. Ask as many questions as you need to to feel comfortable. Use the words *hold on*, *please explain*, and *no*, as often as necessary. *Why* and *how* are also extremely important. Good doctors will tell you plainly that this treatment is the best for your particular cancer. They will explain why it is best and why they chose that particular treatment option. They might even say something about better outcomes and reduced mortality. That is all fine and good. However, other doctors may try to scare you into one treatment that is that doctor's preferred method. Dig in your heels and ask *why*. That treatment may be good for many people, but is it good for YOU? If the side effects are deal breakers, tell the doctor. Insist on exploring alternate treatments. I am NOT promoting obstinacy for the sake of arguments. There are times when the doctor may well state flatly that a particular treatment is about the only one possible given your very specific conditions. No amount of stubborn resistance will change that. If you feel manipulated into a drug or treatment, that is another issue altogether and where a friend or family member can advocate with you and for you. Bottom line: you are the best advocate for you. Collaborate with your oncology team, get your treatments in line. Then decide if and whether you will add herbal supplements.

Chapter Four

Explaining Fatigue: Chemo & Otherwise

You will find I repeat some parts across multiple sections because they cover many issues that come up when dealing with long-term treatments. Reduced energy and stamina are a huge part of many cancer treatments and why many people are reluctant to use Western medicine.

Lack of energy is one of those gremlins that affect the body, mind, and spirit. However, exercise can stimulate the immune system, help reduce depressive symptoms, and help manage pain. The exhaustion in mind and spirit lift. If you can reduce the deep physical exhaustion with a safe herb, you can go for a walk, meet friends, and feel a little more human.

Spoons: energy, stamina, and the fragile nature of both

Unless your friends and family know the ins and outs of cancer treatments, they will have no understanding of what you are handling. Your stamina and energy are not only fragile but also unpredictable. A minor stumble might be a major setback and everyone around you will be confused, perhaps annoyed, if you suddenly back out of plans. I read about using a spoon analogy with chronic illness years ago. Early on in treatment, I shared it with my support circle, and even now, we still use it. I adjusted it to add my friends' improvements.

Note: Some people use real spoons or other utensils to demonstrate. You do you: whatever works to clarify and illuminate understanding is good.

First, the setup. Grab a bunch of spoons from your cutlery drawer. Or chopsticks, forks, whatever. Have a good handful when you sit down with your friends and family. Set them out on a table between you. Then say something like this:

I have limited energy and stamina. I also have limited control over it from day to day, sometimes even hour to hour. Imagine that I have a basket of spoons. Big kitchen spoons, soup spoons, teaspoons, all the way down to demitasse spoons. I wake up in the morning, get out of bed, and go to the bathroom. That takes one tablespoon out of my basket. Shower? At least two more tablespoons. Bad day? A kitchen spoon, too. Back in my bedroom, dry off, get dressed, go downstairs to the kitchen. Another bunch of spoons are used up, set aside. Making and eating breakfast might take even more spoons. Resting after cleanup might restore a few spoons. Drive to work, function: more spoons disappear. Stressful day? Heavy order processing? More spoons. Drive home, walk inside. If it was a good day, I might have a spoon left. Making supper, cleaning up, and bedtime before 8:00p.m. If I had a great day, I might have an extra spoon or two. I could stay up late, watch a movie, even visit with a friend.

The problem is that I have no clue how big that basket is, how big the spoons are, or even how many spoons I might

have every single morning. One morning, I woke up with a big basket, lots of spoons and plans. Fantastic mood. Then I stumbled and fell up the stairs. Tripped again in my bedroom. No more spoons, emotionally wrecked. I napped for two hours and got a few spoons back. I can tip the other way as well. I might start with a few teaspoons in a small basket one morning, get to work, and discover a delightful surprise: a much larger basket of tablespoons! My day expands. I can get more done, my brain is clearer, and my energy is steady.

Using the spoons analogy in daily living

In general, healthy people think of energy like something poured out of a jug, replenishing with rest. Very binary. You have X level of energy at X time of day or after X level of exertion. Sit down and rest or take a nap; your energy is restored and you can continue your day. That was never true during my chemo treatments, and I needed to be very clear about what I could not do. Sometimes, it could change in a few minutes. At other times, I could work steadily without needing a rest. If my energy suddenly dropped, I would say, "My spoons just dropped." Or "I can't find my damned basket of spoons!" My friends started recognizing when I lost my stamina. They began asking, "Did you just lose your spoons?" instead of getting annoyed or frustrated. If I had to turn down an invite, I would say that I would love to come along, but I only had a demitasse spoon and needed that to get into bed. This visually concrete example usually helps people understand something they may have no experience

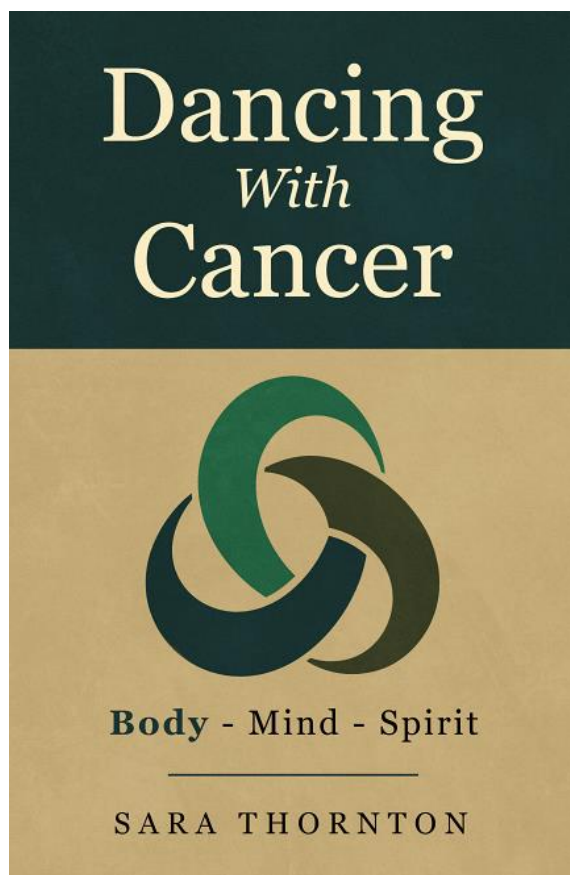
copied with. Instead of leading with frustration or annoyance, they better understand and possibly can help you. I had times when my roomie brought my supper to me or carried my laundry into the basement washroom because she could see I had no spoons left at all. That small help meant I could take a shower or change my sheets as well as do my laundry. Right now, I still have small spoon days. My stamina and energy levels may never return to pre-surgery levels. As frustrating as that is, I accept it. I have adapted, slowed down a bit, and acknowledge that I can do only so much in a given time. I can do more today than I could even four or five months ago. I still have slow days and still use the spoons analogy. Friends have begun using the analogy because it makes so much sense.

This analogy can cover physical or mental energy. "Brain tired" is a mental limit that you reach when you have done too much. My usual tasks like customer questions or order processing could leave me exhausted. The effort to be on, making coherent conversation, analyzing business functions, was just as exhausting as physical labor sometimes. Then I would use the spoons analogy and take a 15-20 minute rest. I could help only so many people before I wanted to collapse. It was draining on a physical level, leaving me struggling with making supper or taking care of myself. Most times, I never separated out which sort of tired I was, I just said I had no spoons.

About the Author

In childhood, Sara Thornton was drawn to herbal medicine to treat her asthma. After years of solitary research and study, she opened an herb shop in Connecticut in 2010. To better serve her customers and to expand and refine her herbal knowledge, she completed a 22-month, 500-hour long distance learning course with Dr. Tieraona Low Dog, a revered herbalist and integrative doctor, author and speaker. She completed Foundations in Herbal Medicine in 2016. In addition, she has attended both the standard and advanced intensives at Dr. Low Dog's Medicine Lodge Ranch. In 2019, she completed The Clinical Roundtable and acquired her certification in clinical herbalism. She is a member of the American Herbalists Guild and continues to expand her skills, research, and knowledge through reading and webinars as well as discussions with other herbalists and medical professionals. In addition to guiding a busy herb shop and teaching classes, Sara also consults with medical professionals both locally and nationally. She lives by a swamp in New England with a very bossy half-Abyssinian cat named Nellie.

Ultimately, she hopes this book will help steer some people away from the rabbit holes. She also hopes sales of this book help pay down some of her remaining and ongoing medical debt.



A clinical herbalist's experience integrating herbs and supplements with standard cancer treatments has become your pocket-guide to help yourself during and after treatments.

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