

Strength for Life Helps Survivors Heal

More studies are showing that physical activity helps improve cancer survivorship. A unique program offers help in several ways.



OVER THE PAST FOUR YEARS, the Long Island, New York-based Strength for Life exercise program has helped more than 200 cancer survivors, says Jacqui Errico. She and co-leader Debbie Hughes were inspired by their friend and mentor, Evelyn Knapp, to establish Strength for Life.

Knapp, who founded The Personal Training Institute, battled breast cancer and said exercise gave her a feeling of control in an uncontrollable situation.

"Although Evelyn lost her battle with cancer, we founded Strength for Life in her memory so we could continue her work and make her vision a reality," Jacqui said.

The free program for cancer survivors has been offered all over Long Island. Jacqui and Debbie, both certified to work with cancer patients, conduct the classes, raise funds to support the program, organize and host the wellness retreats,

and conduct workplace cancer-prevention seminars.

Long Island has a particularly high rate of breast cancer.

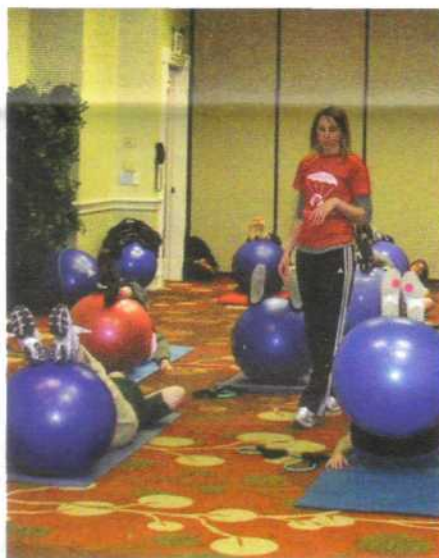
Jacqui estimates that 70-75 percent of the participants are breast cancer patients. But the program reaches out to all kinds of cancer survivors.

Jacqui notes that the American College of Sports Medicine advises that cancer survivors should not just rest. "Researchers with expertise in cancer, fitness, obesity and exercise training are

spreading one of the most important messages to cancer survivors: avoid inactivity," she says.

A Variety of Healing Is Offered

The program's exercise classes are one hour long. Participants may attend two free classes a week during the eight-week session.



Jacqui Errico leading the class. Participants receive a free inflatable ball, yoga mat and resistance band so they can exercise at home.

Weekend-long wellness retreats are held quarterly. Guests may participate in a variety of classes such as yoga, Tai Chi, meditation, Zumba (a high-energy combination of aerobics and dance) and Reiki (an ancient healing method that reduces stress using gentle techniques). Guest speakers discuss other complementary healing approaches.

The program also offers art therapy and creative visualization to foster a feeling of empowerment.

Positive Words from Participants

Participants say Strength for Life classes help them cope with surgery, chemotherapy and/or radiation.

Dennis Starapoli had radiation following cancer surgery. Strength for Life helped him and the support group he leads for oral, head and neck cancer in a weekend-long session for about 30 attendees.

"I enjoy using the inflatable ball to increase my flexibility," he says. "Head and neck cancer patients often lose mobility and flexibility in the neck, especially if they've had surgery and radiation. These kind of stretching exercises are very important to maintaining flexibility."

For Laura Caravella, Strength for Life helped with the stereotype attached to cancer. "So many people expect cancer survivors to be frail, hunched over and barely able to walk," she says. "I believe Strength for Life challenges that stigma by showing all of us that we can stay healthy despite this health issue."

For Teresa Doherty, Strength for Life was indispensable. "Strength for Life helped in my healing. I met an amazing group of women sharing their positive energy and stories." A certified Reiki practitioner, Teresa began volunteering her services at the retreats. "It puts you in such a deep state of relaxation that it turns on that innate healing ability we all have."

To see an easy exercise video for breast cancer survivors, visit www.aicr.org/bcvideo.