

I'm a Survivor!

Denise Wilkins' Vegan Story

I have a lot to live for. I want to see my grandchildren grow up, graduate, get married and have kids of their own. I want to be a great-grandmother! And now that I know how to help myself be healthy, I have real hope. I am a survivor!

It wasn't looking so good last June. I had just bought a condo and was doing some serious remodeling, but I started feeling bad, went to the doctor, and was diagnosed with colon cancer on June 6, 2010. I had surgery 2 weeks later and had 22 inches of my colon removed. About a week later, on June 29, I started chemo.

After the surgery, my friend, Trish Shands, told me about the Food for Life classes and strongly encouraged me to take them. She told me they were about preventing and surviving cancer by eating a pure vegetarian diet. I thought, "I don't think so!" I wasn't a vegetarian and didn't think I could do it. I didn't know how to cook that way and was afraid I wouldn't like the food. But Trish loaned me her book from the class, [*The Survivor's Guide*](#), and I read it all ... the information about how foods can strengthen our immune system and fight cancer cells, and the recipes, which sounded pretty good! After reading the book, I knew I wanted to do this after all. I signed up for the series that was starting in just a couple of weeks.

After attending just the first class session, I was sold! I was impressed with how delicious the food tasted and how simple it was to prepare. But I wasn't able to go to any of the other classes in the series because by then I was getting chemo and was too sick to make it to any others.



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I kept getting chemo until almost Thanksgiving, when the doctor decided to stop the treatments a month earlier than planned because they made me SO sick!

At first I was upset and disappointed because I wanted to do what had to be done to get well. But I gradually began to feel better, and as Christmas approached, I began to celebrate being off chemo. I also signed up for the [Food for Life classes](#) that were starting again in January. I was really excited about it since I knew I wanted to do this and remembered how good that first class was.

I started eating a vegan diet as soon as the class began. I went home and cleaned out my pantry and freezer and gave all the animal products and processed foods to friends. It's a lot easier when I don't have the wrong foods in the house! I'm still working on getting organized about shopping and preparing the healthy foods so that I have good things to eat both at home and when I'm out, but I'm getting better. And I've signed up to take the class again to reinforce what I've learned and give me more time to get really comfortable with implementing this healthy diet.

I don't want *anyone* to have to go through what I've gone through, and yet there are so many people of all ages with cancer. It's scary -- it's painful -- and most of all it's lonely. It's so lonely. No matter how many friends you have and how big your family is, you go through this alone. I want to let everyone know there is something they can do to take care of their own health.

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And I've found out it is so much easier than I ever thought it would be. I want to get this information

out to others as much as possible. One way I do this is by inviting people over for dinner so they can see for themselves how good it tastes.

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medications. I still have significant neuropathy in my hands and feet. They feel cold, constricted, pins and needles and numb. Sometimes all in a day! But I have so much more knowledge now and I am

much more proactive about my health and the care that I receive. Doctors aren't gods; they don't have all the answers. They do their best with the information they have and we need to do the same. We need to do research, ask questions about any regimen we are about to start and always be aware of how we are reacting and then report it. We are in charge of our own lives!

I believe in the Universe. I have my "whole committee" working with me. My goal is to get off all my medications and live a long, healthy life. I am a survivor!