



LIVESTRONG®

FOUNDATION

## LIVESTRONG at the YMCA FAQ

### How do you define a survivor?

We follow the National Cancer Institute and National Institutes of Health definition. A person is a cancer survivor from the point of diagnosis through the balance of life

### What is the program?

LIVESTRONG at the YMCA is a 12-week program whose mission is to empower adult cancer survivors to improve functional capacity and to increase their quality of life through an organized program of fitness and strength.

Cancer survivors work together in small groups to regain physical, emotional and spiritual balance with a guided program of physical activity.

LIVESTRONG at the YMCA coaches facilitate the program in a safe, nonclinical environment. The wellness classes meet twice per week for 90 minutes per session.

Each meeting includes 30 minutes of community building time where survivors can connect with others who've also experienced diagnosis, treatment and the resulting collateral impacts and side effects (physical, social, emotional, relational, financial, etc.). These facilitated discussions allow the opportunity to share information, inspiration, and strategies for moving through barriers. Survivors can get 'real' about feelings, fears and perspectives that may be difficult to talk about with others who have not 'been there'.

The remaining 60 minutes is guided exercise instruction and practice. Lifestyle Coaches personalize program protocols in a way that honors and respects the unique journey of each participant – considering baseline fitness, precautions related to individual treatment protocols and individual goals.

### I am still in treatment. Can I participate?

This is a decision for each survivor and their medical team. Survivors must be finished with the portions of treatment that could limit their full participation. For example, all surgeries which require down-time for recovery should be complete. Some individuals have been successful entering the program while still undergoing chemotherapy or radiation while

others are too sick or too fatigued to obtain the full benefits of the program during such treatments. As treatment protocols and individual responses vary widely, you and your oncology team should discuss the best time for your potential entry as it is imperative that you are able to attend and participate in all 24 sessions.

### **What does the program cost?**

The program is free and includes the benefit of a facility membership for the 12 week duration of the program.

### **How long is the program?**

The program is 12 weeks in length.

### **Can children participate in the program?**

LIVESTRONG at the YMCA is an adult program for participants 18 years and older.

### **Do I have to be a YMCA member to participate in the program?**

You do not have to be a YMCA member to participate in the program. The program is open to all adult survivors in our community.

### **Can I use the facility at times other than my designated LIVESTRONG class time?**

Your participation in the program comes with a facility membership that will allow you to utilize any of our branches during the twelve weeks of the program. You are expected to attend all your LIVESTRONG at the YMCA wellness classes but may supplement those classes with any of our other program offerings.

### **Can my spouse/partner/friend do the program with me?**

One of the benefits offered to program participants is a complimentary 12-week membership for a single support person of your choice. Your support person will not generally be participating in the individual sessions with you though there may be sessions in which they are invited throughout the program. They may come with you to use the facility outside of class time. We will offer a group orientation to our facilities and provide general exercise guidance for all support persons in the 2nd week of the program.

### **Do I have to come to every class?**

The expectation is that unless you are sick with something contagious that you will come to every session. Your success in the program is very much dependent on your ability to commit to the work consistently. In addition, you are committing to participate as part of a community of other survivors who learn from and support one another. If you foresee that you may have significant barriers to your participation, transportation challenges, schedule challenges, etc., you may be advised to wait until those barriers are not a factor.

## **I will miss more than a week due to prior obligations, can I still participate?**

It is critically important that you are able to commit to consistent participation in the program. Because we have limited space in each class, we give priority to those participants who demonstrate willingness and ability to attend all sessions. If the timing of a session is not right for you, your name will be kept on the wait list and you will be contacted for the next available class opening.

## **How in shape do I have to be to start the program? OR...How hard is the program?**

The program is personalized for each individual. In the first week of the program, all participants will complete a series of fitness assessments to establish baseline for cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, muscular endurance, flexibility and balance. Based on the results of these assessments and individual goals, your LIVESTRONG at the YMCA coach will develop a progressive program to move you safely from your starting point - whatever that is - toward a position of increased personal fitness and quality of life. The expectation is that everyone will start and finish in a different place but that everyone will make personal progress and support one another along the way.

## **Do I have to have a doctor's referral to be in the program?**

You do not have to have a doctor's referral for admission to the program but your doctor will have to sign a medical clearance for your participation. Prior to starting the program, your coach will sit down with you and discuss your medical history - inclusive of, but not exclusive to your cancer treatment. You will sign a HIPAA authorization to allow the coaches to send a Medical Clearance to Exercise and get any necessary recommendations and/or restrictions from your doctor. If there is anything that the coaches feel they need more information about in order to best support you, they will ask permission to further connect with your health care team.

## **I finished treatment some time ago. How far out of treatment does one become ineligible to join the program?**

LIVESTRONG at the YMCA is open to any survivor in our community. Years ago, survivors were told to "take it easy" during and after treatment. Further research with cancer survivors has demonstrated that physical activity is important throughout both treatment and survivorship. We recognize that many people whose treatment completed before this research was widely disseminated, did not get the help they needed to reclaim their health. Therefore, it does not matter if you finished treatment last week or 15 years ago. If you are a cancer survivor and are not where you want to be in your wellness journey, you are welcome in the program.

## **How many participants are in each class?**

The class ratio is a maximum of 7 participants to 1 instructor. Many classes will run with two instructors and a maximum of 14 participants. Most classes are also supported by a number of highly trained volunteers who are often graduates of the program. This allows us to increase the amount of personalized attention that each participant receives.

### **Can I participate at more than one branch?**

While we will offer the program at all branches and you will have some choice as to which class you join, you are expected to attend the session for the class at the branch you initially select. You will, however, have access to the other branches to utilize outside of your designated class time.

### **Can I just get the free three-month membership if I don't want to do the class?**

The membership is a benefit of the LIVESTRONG at the YMCA program and cannot be separated from the class registration and participation. The YMCA does offer financial assistance for memberships as part of our Membership For All (MFA) scholarship program. We recognize that the financial burden of cancer treatments may make the full cost of membership less affordable for survivors. If you are not interested in the LIVESTRONG at the YMCA program but are interested in YMCA membership, please ask about the MFA program.

### **What qualifications do your instructors have?**

LIVESTRONG at the YMCA instructors come from varied backgrounds. Some are cancer survivors themselves. Some have particular expertise in group exercise or personal training. Others come from the health care field and may work elsewhere as nurses, social workers, dieticians, etc. All have received solid training in foundational principles of strength and conditioning as well as training in supportive cancer care, signs and symptoms of lymphedema, first aid, CPR/AED and oxygen administration. In addition, all instructors have been through a 16-hour course co-created by the LIVESTRONG Foundation and the YMCA of the USA. This course is based on best practices developed by cancer research hospitals and a significant amount of evidence based research. The coaching team receives continuing education on a regular basis.