

CANCER: DON'T BUY INTO ITS TERROR TACTICS

cancer

Don't buy into its
Terror Tactics

Diana Newcomb



Olive Branch
PUBLISHING

Some names and identifying details in this book have been changed.

CANCER: DON'T BUY INTO ITS TERROR TACTICS

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About This Book

In 1990 Diana received a diagnosis that filled her with terror – she had bowel cancer. As she struggled with this news and its implications, she stumbled across a part of herself she had not met before – her ‘real’ self. It was a meeting that precipitated her on a life-changing journey of self-discovery and healing. And when she reclaimed her health, Diana became inspired to share and teach others the magic she had learned.

A qualified counsellor since 1995, Diana has worked with many cancer patients, both in groups and one-on-one. Cancer – Don’t buy into its terror tactics describes both her personal journey and the philosophy and techniques she has developed. Taking a holistic approach, Diana encourages balancing modern methods with ageless wisdom. Its simple straightforward approach will appeal to someone in deep shock, or a relative or friend hoping to give them support.

This book can help you:

- Defuse the fear that follows a diagnosis of cancer.*
- Deal with the emotional trauma of cancer.*
- Understand the mind/body connection in a mainstream and rational manner.*
- Discover an easy-to-follow self-help healing program.*
- Become motivated to take control of your healing and adopt an approach that complements other medical intervention.*

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≠ PREFACE ≠

I am a cancer survivor.

I was diagnosed with bowel cancer when I was 36 years old. It was already a very difficult time in my life. I was recently separated with two young children, and until the diagnosis, I thought I had been through the worst experience life could throw at me. I had not chosen to leave the relationship and had suffered enormous emotional pain. Sometimes the stress of coping with myself and two brokenhearted children was almost more than I could bear. More than once I imagined it would all be so much easier if I just died.

This changed dramatically when I learned I had cancer. It was a massive wake up call to sit up, take notice, and regain control of my own destiny. It was a huge challenge – a traumatic roller coaster ride of shock, terror, grief, enormous uncertainty, and great physical discomfort.

It was also the catalyst that brought some amazing people into my life; people whose expertise and thinking completely revolutionised my world. I discovered that it was *me*, and *only me*, who could make the decision to get well and thereby create the circumstances that would give my body the best chance to heal. This led to an unforgettable two-year journey of self-discovery and, ultimately, my complete recovery from cancer.

What I learned along the way was so profound and so important, it has imprinted itself on my belief system in every way. So convinced am I of the validity of these findings, I have dedicated my life to studying and working to share this knowledge with others.

At the beginning of my quest for further understanding about the complex nature of the healing paradigm, my perception was that the link between stress and disease was already well established and documented. However I found few books that dealt specifically or comprehensively with this subject.

Through this book I hope to help fill the gap. It is written from two quite separate perspectives: my personal experience of cancer and my own healing journey; and the professional observations and conclusions I have drawn from more than 20 years experience as a counsellor/therapist in private practice, where many of my clients have been cancer patients.

Both these experiences have led me to conclude that cancer, besides being a physical affliction, is also very much an emotional problem. I now understand, healing a disease such as cancer requires more than simply attempting to heal the physical body. It is imperative to try to uncover the reasons why people become ill in the first place. This means looking at the holistic dimension of health, and accepting and recognising the human being as a cohesive unit of body, mind, and spirit that cannot be separated in the healing process.

The emotional component of cancer, where it exists in our spirit, encompasses our innate and fundamental expression, the hidden part of us. To effect lasting healing of the body we must also heal the spirit and the perception of the self.

My hope is this book will help to take away the paralysis of fear that can accompany a diagnosis of cancer, and demystify the disease so it is no longer seen as a seemingly random occurrence over which there is absolutely no control. I have endeavoured to provide simple and logical explanations to support my theories and to motivate the reader to attempt my healing program.

I extend to everybody who embarks on this journey my support and respect for their courage. I am very open to receiving emails, questions and feedback from readers.

Good Luck.

Diana Newcomb

PART ONE

'YOU'VE GOT CANCER!'

CHAPTER ONE

YOUR WORST NIGHTMARE



— *Coping with the Diagnosis* —

You have just been diagnosed with cancer. What do you do; what can you do? Unless you have been diagnosed with cancer, you cannot imagine the fear or the shock that follows the delivery of those fateful words.

Let me tell you my story.

I was diagnosed with cancer in 1990. Thirty-six years old and recently separated, I had a daughter aged twelve and a son, eight.

For a few months I had suspected that something was not quite in order with my bowel as I had been constipated quite often, and this sometimes had resulted in bleeding when I had a bowel motion.

When I went along to see my GP he had been rather dismissive of my concerns, telling me that it was probably just haemorrhoids. He had given me a prescription for some ointment that he felt would sort out the problem. The trouble was it didn't. So I happened to mention it to my gynaecologist during a routine examination. He took a much more serious view of what I told him and insisted I go back to my GP and demand to have a barium enema x-ray.

To be honest I wasn't too concerned about the outcome of this. Naively I supposed that life had dealt me some tough cards of late, so I'd had my run of bad luck.

The procedure wasn't at all painful, just unpleasant. When it was over they told me that it would take a little time while they looked at

the x-rays, and then they would be able to tell me the results.

"Diana - is your husband or someone here with you today?"

I remember taking a huge gulp, as the wound of the separation was reopened by these words. "No, but I do have a friend here to drive me home afterwards."

"Then perhaps you'd like to invite them to accompany you in here, for a bit of moral support?"

I should have been alerted by the concerned kindly face of the nurse when she offered me a cup of tea. I just thought she was being nice. But my thoughts were all to change with the reappearance of the radiographer.

That room is forever etched in my memory: the pale peach wall, the bed I lay on for the x-ray, the metal clips that positioned the pictures up to the light. He held a blue pencil which he used to illustrate his points.

"Diana, we have found a 20mm polyp here in your rectum...you can see the triangular growth there? Now we are not sure that this polyp is malignant, but there is only a 20% chance that it might not be." He paused to give me time to assimilate this news.

I remember the room swimming in and out of focus as I struggled to understand what he had just told me. I suddenly felt freezing cold, gripped by gut-wrenching fear. I was also terrified that I was going to vomit. Time slowed right down and my teeth started chattering. I struggled to try and think of what to say next without becoming hopelessly emotional.

"Diana, there are probably lots of questions you will want to ask when you have had some time to think about all this, but for now I want you to understand that the next step is to see a colorectal surgeon who will perform an operation to remove the polyp. We will be contacting your GP who will make all the necessary arrangements."

I can't remember the drive home, but I can recall the phone was ringing as I entered the house. It was my GP who spoke very slowly in a sombre voice that dashed all 20% of my hopes.

"Diana, I am very very sorry to hear your bad news, we will do all we can to get you into a surgeon immediately, but it will be at least a week before we can get you an appointment. I'd like to see you, though, first thing on Tuesday to take a look for myself. I just hope there aren't too many malignant cells."

It was a Thursday afternoon, the start of the Easter holiday, and the children had already gone away with their father. I felt incredibly alone and frightened for the future. I decided I could only cope with telling my family and very close friends at this stage. I went around to see my parents as I didn't think I could tell them over the phone. It's odd, but I felt really bad having to dump this on them, so soon after my marriage break up.

My mother took it very badly. She burst into floods of tears and screamed and cursed loudly, which was very unusual. My father tried to make everything calm and asked me if I thought I should get a second opinion. My sisters and brother were distressed but totally supportive. My ex-husband offered to do anything to help with the children. Everyone's reaction was similar. I could see the fear and pity in their eyes. Most people cried when I told them. It was like they all feared the worst, even though they made great attempts to cover up their feelings and be positive for my sake. But no matter how you looked at it, being diagnosed with cancer was a biggie and a great cause for concern.

After a bit of the fog of shock wore off I decided to be pro-active. I went along to my daughter's school to talk to the school counsellor about my impending operation and the affect it may have on my daughter. She took a deep breath, looked me straight in the eye, and asked me if I honestly wanted to die. I couldn't believe my ears, as I didn't know what the outcome of the operation was going to be at that stage. Furthermore, I was devastated that she had even talked about the possibility of me dying. I must have looked as if I was really going to lose my composure, as she quickly added I could think about whether or not I really did want to die - my children had already coped with the separation of their parents and this really could be all too much for them.

She seemed to be insinuating that I had a choice in the matter. Calmly she continued to tell me that my children really needed me and that it was up to me to make this important decision. It was the first time in my life I had ever heard anyone talk about having a choice between living or dying.



— *Coping with the Shock* —

The diagnosis of cancer is absolutely terrifying. It brings up the immediate question of your own mortality and the possibility it may be ‘sooner rather than later’. The shock of the diagnosis clouds your ability to think or see straight at first. The fear which accompanies it has a horrible habit of sneaking up on you in the middle of the night and robbing you of precious healing sleep. To make matters worse, it is often the one thing you can’t talk about to the people closest to you, because it brings up their own worst fears as well.

In order to defuse the stress and the hold your fears have over you, you need to be able to discuss those fears with someone who won’t be threatened by your feelings.

Facing up to reality:

When you are diagnosed with cancer and brought face to face with your own mortality for the first time, the shock is so huge it is often much easier to pretend it really isn’t happening. The reality of the situation is just too frightening to comprehend. And there is a further fear – what if the mere process of acknowledging that the disease could kill you, might in itself cause you to die.

The fear is stupefying, causing some people to say they will get the surgery or treatment behind them and *then* do the positive thinking. And yet, after they have been through the recovery period, they carry on as usual, unable to acknowledge they need to work on the problems that gave rise to the cancer in the first place.

The problem is, cancer is not just a bout of the ‘flu, which will disappear after a few days. It threatens your very existence. Certainly, thinking positively is part of the holistic healing methodology. But there is a lot more work than that involved if one is to ensure the cancer doesn’t return.

*DON'T LET THE SHOCK OF YOUR DIAGNOSIS PREVENT
YOU FROM TAKING IMMEDIATE ACTION!*

The shock in itself is so stressful it can significantly add to the risk of your becoming sicker. At the very least you are going to need to talk to someone very reliable – and preferably a professional – to help you deal with the shock.

I would strongly recommend you choose someone who is not emotionally connected to you in any way. Finding someone you like and trust is a good start for forming an on-going relationship for support and assistance in working through all the emotional components of your disease.

Immobilised by fear:

The shock affects people in different ways. Some people go off on a tangent, rather like headless chooks, reacting in panic and trying anything anyone suggests. Others feel totally immobilised and suffer from an extreme lack of motivation.

In my work as a counsellor it is not unusual to be faced with someone who has come to see me when it is far too late. I believe they delay because counselling is often perceived as a negative thing in our society. It is heartbreaking to watch terminally ill people, who have finally been given the jolt they needed to motivate them, struggle as they explore further options. How often I have wished they had read the early warning signs and realised how vital it is to begin a pro-active approach as soon as they know things are going wrong.

*IT IS VERY TOUGH REALITY WHEN IT IS JUST TOO HARD
TO CHANGE ANYTHING.*

Embracing change is one of the hardest things for you to do. How often have you been aware of the need to change a situation you do not like, and yet gone to extraordinary lengths to find reasons to maintain the status quo.

The truth of the matter is, it takes considerable energy and often great courage to make big changes. Changes can involve doing things that not only might turn your own life upside down, they can involve other people, creating unpleasant situations you

would prefer not to have to confront. Therefore, you will not be surprised to learn that many people choose to avoid what they perceive as more pain, and remain stuck in a situation that, while uncomfortable, seems preferable.

Russian Roulette:

It may be ok to choose not to deal with a problem if you are in good health and the circumstances of your life are by and large under control – and provided the situation has not dragged on too long. However, if you have been diagnosed with cancer, it is more than mere coincidence if aspects of your life seem overwhelming. In fact, it is a key indicator that an urgent reappraisal of your situation and some fast damage control is needed.

IF YOU ARE UNWILLING TO FACE UP TO MAKING IMPORTANT CHANGES, YOU ARE PLAYING RUSSIAN ROULETTE.

It never ceases to amaze me how many people would literally rather die than change an aspect of their life that is causing them pain and, subsequently, ill health. You'd think the shock of being diagnosed with a potentially terminal illness would be enough to motivate someone to do all in their power to change the situation. The sad truth is many people believe they have no power over their lives or their health. It is almost as if the witch doctor has pointed the bone at them – like those who take a medical diagnosis of life expectancy so literally, they die right on cue almost to the very day.

THE HUMAN MIND IS THE STRONGEST FORCE IN THE UNIVERSE, FAR STRONGER THAN MOST PEOPLE IMAGINE. YOU CAN TRAIN YOUR MIND TO WORK IN A WAY THAT HAS POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE RESULTS.

With a little work and understanding of this largely untapped power, and a bit of practice, you can learn to train your mind to focus on changing your situation for the better and facilitate the physical healing of your body. Do not wait until all else has failed and secondary cancer has set in. Once that happens, it can be

so much tougher – although not always an impossible task – to turn the situation around.

Beware of the false high:

Even though you may have been given a total clearance after surgery for cancer, *you will continue to experience the after effects of the shock of your diagnosis.* You can be tricked into believing the horrible experience is now safely behind you, leaving you to carry on exactly as before. This is a natural defence mechanism, but it is also another form of good old denial, where you delude yourself that all will now be magically made better.

The problem is you still have *the nagging little voice of fear* that surfaces whenever you are reminded of your ordeal. Believe it or not that little voice is actually there to help you. It is your *real self* reminding you that before you were diagnosed with cancer, you had issues going on that needed addressing. If these things are not faced up to or resolved at this point, they can be the cause of you becoming sick again in the future.

A fateful visit:

A few days after I was diagnosed with cancer it was my birthday. There were no celebrations. But one curious thing happened, which was to become a godsend over my coming months of dealing with the shock of cancer.

Geoff – one of my sister's work mates – appeared at the back door of my house. I remember my eyes were red-rimmed from crying all night as I went down to answer the door in my dressing gown. He was holding out a book to me. "I heard about your diagnosis," he told me. "I just wanted to give you this. I think it could be very helpful."

The book was 'You Can Conquer Cancer' written by Australian vet, Ian Gawler.¹ It proved to be the most wonderful book loan ever. Ian Gawler's story is about his encounter and subsequent struggle with cancer, and how he healed himself. He was definitely an example of the sickest a person can get and yet live to tell the tale. His story explains and illustrates his theory of how stress can break down the immune system to a point where the latent cancer cells can proliferate. He also gives rudimentary instruction on how to meditate and detailed

1. Your Can Conquer Cancer by Ian Gawler, Hill of Content Publishing 1984.

information on the dietary regime he adhered to.

As I had a whole week to wait before my operation, I felt I had nothing to lose by trying to follow his meditation instructions. From the moment I tried meditation, I noticed a pleasant tingling sensation during the process, followed by a much calmer state of mind for a time afterwards. If I hadn't been so desperate to do anything that gave me the chance to stay alive, I doubt I would have tried it - even out of curiosity. But I probably wouldn't have read the book either.

The night before the operation my surgeon came in to run through the surgical procedure. He then drew a big line on my tummy in green felt tip pen. When I asked him what that was for, he explained it was where he would attach the colostomy bag if needed. To say I was terrified was an understatement. When he left I was feeling utterly helpless and despondent. I cast about for something that would blot out this awful anguish and distress. It suddenly occurred to me to try the meditation process in an attempt to calm myself down a little, although looking back at the state I was in, I don't know how I even remembered how to go about it.

Amazingly, I quite quickly began to feel much less anxious and detached, and was filled with an overwhelming sense that I wasn't as alone as I'd imagined. Everything was going to be all right. The calm feeling stayed with me right up until I was wheeled into the operating theatre.¹

— *Mobilising the Will to Live* —

What would you do if I could wave a magic wand and take away your cancer? Before you read on, take a few minutes to write a list of all the things you would like to do in the future. Do not take your diagnosis into account - write as if it hasn't happened. Then read on.



When someone with cancer comes to me for counselling I always set them the above task during our first session. The answers to this question provide a key indicator for me because what they reply is directly related to their will to live. If someone very quickly identifies at least one thing that is *vitaly important*

1. See Chapter 8 for a guide to meditating and how it could help you.

to them, and indicates some sort of passion for living, I know they have a much higher chance of recovery than someone who is at a loss to come up with anything they would consider worth doing in the future.

Take a look at what you have written. You will know what category your response has fallen into. It is very important you recognise whether or not you are already sabotaging your chances of recovery. There could be several reasons why you might be struggling to conjure up a wish-list for the future. And the first, a fear of failure, is shared by many more people than you probably realise.

Fear of failure:

If you feel you have failed at times and, despite trying, have been unable to rectify that failure; or if you have been unable to achieve something that was important to you, it is possible you believe there is no point in trying for the future because you have failed in the past.

Your belief may result from an event in your life that was, in fact, beyond your control (perhaps, a bad experience you believe you could have prevented by acting differently). Yet you are holding on to a picture of yourself as someone who is powerless to change *anything*. Now is your chance to start afresh, by changing the way you act and trying to bring about a positive change in your health.

I do not see failure as a negative thing. I see people trying to achieve all sorts of things in life, and sometimes these things work out and sometimes they don't.

*MISTAKES ARE NOT FAULTS - THEY ARE EXPERIENCES
FROM WHICH WE LEARN TO ACT IN A DIFFERENT WAY
TO PRODUCE A DIFFERENT RESULT.*

Everyone make mistakes at times. That is part of being human. Of course, sometimes these mistakes can be tragic and cause devastating consequences. However, the greater tragedy occurs

if you don't use your negative past experiences to learn from them. It's true there are some things you can never undo. But you can choose never to repeat a past performance you feel disappointment and regret over.

Guilt is a wasted and energy-sapping emotion. If you don't deal with it, you will carry it around with you, allowing it to affect you forever. You can't change the past but you can change for the future.

It is important for you to consider if fear of failure is the reason why you may be feeling you have no control over your future or your disease. Now may be the time to take a risk and do something that could provide you with proof you are more powerful than you think.

The sub-conscious death urge:

The second reason why some people find it difficult to write down what they would like to do in the future, given a second chance, is that they may not wish to live any longer. When you have begun truly to appreciate the link between your disease and your emotional state, you will perhaps understand that for some people cancer is a way out from dealing with all the seemingly insurmountable problems in their life. Such people may not have the desire or the energy to motivate themselves to begin the process of recovery.

As a counsellor I see this often. There are many people who profess to want to live, yet they make no attempt to move in that direction and seem to be giving up. Others continue with behaviour that is extremely dangerous to their health, such as smoking after being diagnosed with lung cancer, or remaining in a violent relationship, or working punishing long hours. It is often a great relief for a person to be confronted with this aspect of their own behaviour. They can then admit to feeling they are not sure about wanting to live any more.

Many people fall into this category initially – telling me they are in the process of deciding whether or not they still feel life is

worth living. While it may not apply so much to the older person who feels they have had many good years and are ready to die, younger people may have feelings of depression and hopelessness around many circumstances of their life.

If you feel you fall into this category, working together with a professional counsellor for a while may empower you to go on to address some of these tough issues – helping you to gain a renewed zest for life and to decide to live rather than die.

Making the choice to die:

Whilst I will do anything in my power to assist someone to mobilise their will to live, I accept there are times when a person has made the choice to die. In making this choice consciously there is much work we can do to together to make the process easier. I do not see death as failure. I see it as a choice someone comes to when the time is right for them to make it. After all, in the end none of us leaves this world alive.

Indeed, it is every bit as much of a privilege to work with someone who has chosen to die as it is to work with someone who is ready to give life another chance.

— ***Facing Your Fears*** —

Fear is your worst enemy, especially because cancer has a nasty tendency to recur. The most perplexing thing is that the health outcome sometimes bears little relationship to the earlier prognosis – the best prognosis can have the worst result, and vice versa.

It would be very easy to dwell on this prospect and lose sight of a few other important pieces of information. Bernie Segal, a well-respected American oncologist, suggests in his book *Love Medicine and Miracles*¹ most people treat their bodies in much the same way as they do their cars when they take them in for repairs. They expect their doctor will do everything necessary to heal the problem without them having to do anything themselves.

1. *Love, Medicine & Miracles* by Bernie S Segal, Arrow Books, 1988

Bernie Segal views healing as a complex issue, and alludes to the mystery of people faced with the worst prognoses who become well, while people with the best chances sometimes do not survive. It caused him deep soul searching and pain when he lost these higher-odds patients, as he used to blame himself, feeling he had perhaps not done enough for them. Now he and others acknowledge there is another dimension to this complex puzzle of healing.

Why do some people survive, then, when the odds are so highly stacked against them?

THE MANNER IN WHICH YOU COPE WITH STRESS IS THE KEY TO WHETHER YOU WILL BE AT A HIGHER RISK OF DEVELOPING A DISEASE SUCH AS CANCER.

Indeed, it is often not the highest amount of stress that causes our immune system to break down. It is the way in which the stress is handled. This theory is well illustrated by the case of the cancer patient who has successful surgery and a great prognosis, yet gets sick again further down the track. It is common to hear people say that the doctors 'didn't get it all the first time', or that the cancer was only really in remission. I bet you've heard that before. In reality, it's more likely to be the old 'taking in the car to the panel beaters' routine – trusting someone else will fix your body without you having any part to play or, for that matter, any control whatsoever over your destiny.

We all react differently to similar situations. It is what makes us unique. Whether you view the state of the glass as half-full or half-empty will not mean any difference in the level in the glass. But it will mean the world of difference to you.

IF YOU ARE DIAGNOSED WITH CANCER BUT CARRY ON BEHAVING EXACTLY THE SAME WAY YOU DID BEFORE WITHOUT MAKING ANY CHANGES IN YOUR LIFE, YOU ARE IN SERIOUS DANGER OF BECOMING SICKER AND EVEN DYING.

What if you do tend to interpret your life in a way that is too

often negative or self-defeating? If you realised you do this and discovered it was having an adverse effect on your health, could you change the way you perceive the world?

Absolutely you could! If you are prepared to invest in a bit of time and energy, learning about yourself and the way in which you behave and react to different situations, you can change your perspective. Once you become aware of your potentially harmful behaviour patterns you can be coached to learn new and healthier methods to cope with stressful situations. You can defuse many of your fears by facing up to them and dealing with them. This is the way your fears lose their power over you.