

INCREASING POSITIVE EMOTIONS

The purpose of our lives is to be happy.

—HIS HOLINESS THE FOURTEENTH DALAI LAMA

The secret to a good life may be as simple as one word: happiness. When we feel happy and loving, our physical bodies are flooded with cancer-fighting immune cells, our emotional lives are free of stress and worry, and our social and work relationships improve. The survivors I study work diligently to find ways of increasing the amount of love, joy, and happiness they feel in the present moment. It is important to note that releasing emotions that are held in the body, such as stress, fear, anger, regret, and sadness, is quite different from what this chapter explores. Releasing suppressed emotions from the past does not necessarily mean that you will increase the amount of positive emotions in your present, although it certainly paves the way for that to happen.

In this chapter, we will explore what positive emotions are and how they affect our immune systems. Next, we'll discuss two important aspects of increasing positive emotions before we dive into the healing story of a stage 4 cancer patient named Saranne Rothberg who considered daily happiness to be her most important medicine. Finally, I will give you a simple prescription for fun,

based on what I have learned from the people I work with, that will help bring more joy and happiness into your daily life.

WHAT ARE POSITIVE EMOTIONS?

The positive emotions Radical Remission survivors try to experience on a daily basis are happiness, joy, and love. The definitions of the words “happiness” and “joy” most people can agree on, but the use of the word “love” in this chapter may require further explanation.

In this book, I discuss three types of love. The first type is the feeling you get when you love yourself, your life, and others. It is a feeling of love that comes from within you and that you then project outward into your life. The second type of love is received by you from others; it is also called “social support.” I purposefully separated these two kinds of love—that which you *give* to yourself and others versus that which you *receive*—because the participants in my research talk about them as two distinct actions, and also because not everyone excels at both. Finally, the third type of love, discussed in chapter 8, is an unconditional and spiritual type of love, which has no sense of separateness, no sense of “you” or “I.”

This chapter focuses on the first type of love, which is the love, along with the happiness and joy, you create in your own life and then spread to others. One Radical Remission survivor who really focuses on this first type of love is Effrat Livny. Effrat was diagnosed with stage 3C ovarian cancer at the age of forty-nine, ironically only four years after she had left her high-stress job in order to enjoy life more. While she used a wide variety of both conventional and alternative treatments in order to address her cancer, increasing positive emotions was, for her, one of the most important steps she took:

- Deepen our breathing, which brings more oxygen to each cell
- Digest our food more slowly, which helps the body absorb more nutrients
- Increase white and red blood cell activity, which helps the immune system
- Increase natural killer cell activity, which helps the immune system fight cancer
- Clear out any infections
- Scan for cancer and remove any cancer cells

All these amazing physical changes have been documented in clinical studies, in which researchers do things like count people's number of immune cells before and after showing them a comedy video.² The reason this list is so relevant to cancer patients is that all these changes have also been shown to improve significantly the immune system's ability to remove cancer cells.³ Laughter has even been shown to increase the number of immune cells of people undergoing chemotherapy.⁴ Similar studies have shown that people who are battling an illness and have an overall positive attitude live significantly longer than people who are battling an illness and are pessimistic.⁵ In other words, study after study is finding evidence to back up the old saying "Happy people live longer."

A spiritual healer I studied from Hawaii named Murali believes so firmly in the power of positive emotions to boost the immune system, she recommends that all her cancer patients send love directly to their cancer cells:

Once you're beginning to feel comfortable about non-resistance [to your cancer], your second step would be more and more of an

intended feeling of love directed visually [toward your cancer].... Your body does not know the difference between feeling good with a smile that's genuine—let's say you're watching a comedy and just naturally smiling—or intending one [a smile]. And when you do that, guess what happens? Endorphins! Big, beautiful, loving endorphins that send all these healing messages to the cells.... If you could see it physically, you would actually be looking at streams of endorphins rushing, feel-good hormones rushing, rushing to create much more loving energy.

When Murali suggested this during our interview, I explained to her that many of the cancer patients I work with would be afraid that sending love to their cancer cells would make them grow even faster. Murali instantly responded that sending love to cancer cells in this way would actually repair them and return them to their natural, healthy state. Her hypothesis could very well be accurate, since we already know that endorphins help heal damaged cells by both decreasing inflammation and increasing the immune cell activity around damaged cells.⁶

Many of the other healers I have interviewed from around the world agree with Murali. They believe that cancer cells are simply healthy cells that have been damaged and need to be repaired. Western medicine agrees that cancer cells have been damaged—either by a toxin, virus, bacteria, or genetic mutation—but it also believes that cancer cells are beyond repair, and therefore the only option is to kill them. That is why almost all cancer research for the past hundred years has looked for the best way to kill cancer cells, whether by chemotherapy, radiation, or surgery.

Meanwhile, there has been very little research done on whether or not damaged cancer cells can be *rehabilitated* into healthy cells. However, at least one recent and groundbreaking study may prove

the main tumor surgically removed from his neck, his intuition told him not to do the recommended chemo and radiation, much to his doctor's dismay. Instead, he decided to embark on an intense self-healing program, which included, among other things, focusing on his emotions:

I experienced profound changes in my very being. My thoughts and emotions were radically different as I experienced a total paradigm shift in my existence. . . . I cherished my children, myself, and the very moment that is "now" like never before. . . . I acquired a sense of perspective, and through intense introspection and study, I was able to achieve a paradigm shift in my consciousness. This had a cascade effect upon my entire existence—nothing was the same.

By making time each day to appreciate the present moment, Allen began to be filled with emotions such as love and gratitude, which eventually became so strong that his entire life changed for the better. With the help of other changes (e.g., diet), it has now been five years (and counting), and Allen currently has no evidence of disease.

In a similar vein, Carlos Sauer, a shamanic healer from Brazil, describes the importance of making happiness a daily habit in this way:

[You take] a new look at the sunrise, or you look at the new day, and you say, "Thank you, God. Thank you, Creator, for this wonderful new day. I've never, ever seen it before. This is a brand new day! Today is going to be a great day. It's already a great day. . . . The only thing we have is today—right now—so, I try to do everything I can to enjoy every minute of my day. . . . To be

in good health has a lot to do with happiness. Your health is connected to your happiness.

Like so many of the other healers I interview, Carlos believes a daily dose of happiness is one of the most important "medicines" you can take.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO FEEL HAPPY ALL THE TIME

Please keep in mind that making a commitment to feeling happy for at least five minutes a day is not the same thing as thinking you need to feel happy *all day, every day* in order to improve your health. This is a tragic and misguided conclusion that has sprung out of the mind-body medicine movement, such that many cancer patients feel guilty whenever they are stressed or scared, because they know that these emotions can weaken the immune system. Can you imagine the pressure of having to feel happy all of the time, especially when dealing with a life-threatening illness?

It is true that stress, fear, grief, and anger have weakening effects on the immune system. However, it never made sense to me to cover up valid feelings of fear with a false veneer of positivity along with an additional layer of guilt. That's why I was so pleased to learn that most Radical Remission survivors and alternative healers believe it is healthiest for a person to feel fully, and then *release* fully, any and all emotions that come up, whether they be positive or negative. Doing so allows you not only to experience the full range of human expression, but also to spend more time feeling truly happy in between the various waves of emotion. Young toddlers are a great example of this—they can be flooded with anger one moment, and after feeling it fully and releasing it, they will be completely happy five minutes later.

node involvement. However, further testing soon revealed the worst possible scenario: it was actually stage 4 breast cancer, and it had not only spread to her lymph nodes but also formed small metastases above and under her aorta and possibly on her neck and spine.

When Saranne heard this news, she was absolutely terrified. Her doctor told her on a Friday afternoon, but she was not able to meet with her new oncologist until Monday. Knowing she would be facing this grave diagnosis all alone, with only her five-year-old daughter by her side, Saranne felt overwhelmed in the face of the oncoming ordeal. Then, suddenly, she remembered something:

I knew about the life of Norman Cousins and the power of therapeutic humor—using laughter and a comic perspective. And so, although I was shocked and stunned from the diagnosis, with no support system, because I had read an excerpt from Norman Cousins's book Anatomy of an Illness when I was in college, I ran to the video store and got every standup comedy tape they had.

Fighting back tears and holding on to her tall stack of videotapes, Saranne went home to face her young daughter. After relieving the babysitter, she fed, bathed, and tucked Lauriel into bed as fast as she could, knowing that she would not be able to hold back her tears for very long. As soon as she closed the door to her daughter's room, Saranne went into the other room and collapsed into sobs. How would she go in for treatment? Who would help her? How would she earn a living? Who would take her daughter to school on treatment days? These questions raced through her mind in a vicious loop. Then, after a long while, she looked over at her pile of videotapes and saw Eddie Murphy staring back at her.

I said, "Look, it worked for Norman Cousins. Let's see if it can work for me." And so, I put in Eddie Murphy, and at first, I

was hysterically crying. I couldn't hear the jokes, couldn't hear the punch lines, couldn't hear the laughter. But I just kept repeating "It worked for Norman Cousins, maybe it can work for me." And eventually I started to catch the punch lines and eventually I started to laugh. And then I got hysterically laughing. And I realized that the line between comedy and trauma is so fine. So fine! Tears of sadness and tears of joy have two different compositions, but they're still tears and still cathartic.

Having this experience made Saranne realize that switching from trauma to laughter would not be as hard as she had thought—and perhaps Norman Cousins had been onto something. As she watched the videos, she noticed that an intense hour of laughter seemed to short-circuit all her trauma and fear. So, she stayed up that entire night watching every single video she had rented. By the time her daughter awoke the next morning, Saranne was clear about what she needed to do. She and her daughter purposefully had to create an environment of joy and laughter in order to balance out all the fear and side effects that were coming their way:

I said to my daughter, "We are going to make an appointment to laugh every day." And she said, "Is that like a play date?" [Laughs] And I was like "Yeah!" Then I said, "And you're going to be my humor buddy. Every day we're going to make each other laugh at this appointment to laugh." And she said, "Is that like a playmate, Mommy?" And I was like "Yeah!" And then it bit me—out of the mouth of babes. I mean, what happened? How did I lose my playmates? And how did those play dates stop? From the divorce and moving, and we had a fire, and the stress of earning a living—just even raising a child—and having sick family members. All these stressors just kind of sucked the

with people she felt were negative or, in her words, “parasitic” and more time with people who made her laugh and feel loved. Much to her surprise, this quickly led to a very noticeable change: at the end of each day she felt recharged instead of drained. This new surge of energy allowed her to rebuild her life with only positive values, such as health, fairness, and happiness.

Hearing about how much Saranne was changing her life made me remember her earlier comment of “No wonder I had cancer.” Therefore, I asked Saranne if she had any thoughts as to what might cause cancer. She immediately replied:

I do think that there are environmental issues, of course, like decreasing sugar, eating less hormonal products, not living near a power plant, not smoking, etc. But in my case, and in other cases that I'm privy to, so much of it was about unprocessed pain, trauma, and hate. Once I started to deal with those disappointments, those fears, and to remove the toxic people out of my life, my cancer didn't really have a stranglehold on me anymore.

After she was done cleaning up her negative relationships with other people, Saranne next turned her attention to her relationship with God. She had been spiritual before her diagnosis, but once cancer came into her life, Saranne actively started a dialogue with God:

I really looked at it as, I wouldn't have gotten cancer unless I was supposed to see something or help this world in a way that I would never be able to do if I wasn't put in that situation. And so, instead of ever saying “Why me?” I actually always said, “Okay, I'm listening. What am I supposed to learn here, or what

am I supposed to reach here? How is my cancer journey supposed to help make the world better? What impact am I supposed to have in that chemo chair that I would never have known about if I hadn't gotten cancer?”

In this way, Saranne felt empowered by her cancer diagnosis as opposed to victimized by it. Instead of becoming angry with God, she spent her time looking for signs and clues as to what she was supposed to be doing differently with her life. Treating God as if he were her chief medical adviser, Saranne simply tried to listen—*deeply* listen—for divine guidance. When she listened in this way, answers usually came to her quite clearly:

I realized that my cancer was a wake-up call—that my cancer, and the pain behind that cancer, was just part of a journey that had to happen. So that when I was faced with all of the challenges of being told, “You have cancer. You have less than five years to live. Your cancer is not responding [to treatment],” I could stand up to that diagnosis and say, “Says who?! I'm not going to buy it! I am not going to ingest that and play that drama out. I have enough strength and focus, enough discipline and reasons to live, that I'll figure this out with God's help. And if I look at this as a wake-up call to focus my vision somewhere, then I don't need to die. I just need to meet the call.”

Saranne's most powerful reason for living was her daughter, Lauriel. With both her mother and grandmother now deceased, Saranne wanted nothing more than to be able to raise her child. Because of this, Saranne was willing to try “anything and everything” to get well, no matter how crazy it sounded, and her positive, open-minded attitude allowed her to see every new suggestion as a reason

And I laughed back. And then he scrunched up his face again, and he looked at me and, through the interpreter, said, "You are very well." I had stage 4 cancer that no one could get a handle on, and he's telling me I'm very well! [laughs] And I looked him in the eye, and I said, "I know." And he said again, "You are very, very well!" And I said, "I know!" [laughs]

Saranne was encouraged by this healer's declaration, because the truth was, she did feel well. She was happier than she had ever been, because she was making happiness and joy her number one priority each day. After this brief interaction, Dr. Dhonden began to point to various places on her body in complete silence. Her awe began to build as she watched him, with incredible accuracy, point to every place on her body where she had either had cancer in the past or had cancer presently. "He could see what scans couldn't see," she said and was instantly hopeful that this man could help her:

Then he scrunched his face up again and said, "This is old." And I said, "I know." And then he said, "Can you be patient?" And I laughed so hard, and I said, "Dr. Dhonden"—again through the interpreter—"If I could be patient, I probably wouldn't have cancer right now." [laughs] Then he said, "Tibetan herbs don't work the way Western medicine does. You have to be patient and let the herbs collect in your system. Western medicine comes in very quickly and destroys the cells. Eastern medicine builds in your system and creates energy in your immune system. And then your immune system fights your own disturbance."

Intriguingly, Yeshi Dhonden never referred to Saranne's illness as "cancer" but only as a "disturbance" in her body. At this point, Saranne was eager to get started on his herbs, so she asked him

what she could expect in terms of a time line. He said that while her symptoms of cancer should start to go away in about a month, her scans would likely not show a reduction in cancer until about three months. Thrilled with the possibility of her cancer actually going away, Saranne's only remaining issue was cost. Much to her happy surprise, however, while her chemo had cost about twelve hundred dollars per day, the herbs would cost only about a dollar per day:

So, he asked me if I would take his herbs. And I said, "Sir, if you asked me to hang naked off the Statue of Liberty right now and sing 'God Bless America,' I would do it." [laughs] He laughed, and then he said, "No, I just need you to take my herbs." [laughs] So, I started to take the herbs—and within thirty-six hours my most major symptoms started to dissipate. He had said it would take about a month!

Through her experience, Saranne had developed her own comprehensive list of twenty-six subtle symptoms that arose in her body whenever her cancer was growing. Even though her Western doctors did not take her unusual list of symptoms seriously, Saranne trusted what they meant for her body. Amazingly, after only a day and a half of taking Dr. Dhonden's herbs, three of her major symptoms disappeared: extreme fatigue, a burning sensation on her lips, and an internal itching and burning sensation at the site of her cancer.

This quicker-than-expected improvement gave her the courage she needed to postpone her fourth surgery and tell her Western doctors that she only wanted to take the herbs and be monitored closely. With much resistance, they agreed to her request and scanned her three weeks later. The scan showed that the rate at which her cancer was growing had slowed; however, it was still there. Trying to focus on the fact that it was at least slowing down, Saranne asked to

the life and teachings and research of Norman Cousins. I had something to latch on to that first weekend that was positive, and I researched more and more about the power of the mind over the body, and especially the power of joy and hope over the body. So, I don't believe that it was just one element that helped me to have a Radical Remission and heal. I believe that, because my mind and my spirit were so strong, and [because] I created an environment—emotionally, spiritually, medically, socially—that was so full, so abundant, so healthy, so joyful. . . . when my immune system did wake up [due to the Tibetan Medicine System], the rest of my body was ready to follow.

Today, more than sixteen years after being diagnosed with stage 4 breast cancer, Saranne is still cancer-free and thrilled to be alive to watch her ComedyCures charity programs inspire people around the world and to witness her daughter Lauriel's writing career span from music to TV and film.

SARANNE IS A wonderful example of someone who used conventional medicine at the same time as complementary techniques in order to strengthen her body, mind, and spirit. This multifaceted healing approach not only helped her endure the many years of arduous medical treatment, but it also gave Saranne other options—such as daily laughter therapy and Tiberan Medicine System—when her chemo, surgery, and radiation stopped working. No matter how sick or afraid she may have felt on any given day, she did not allow herself to go to sleep without at least five minutes of laughter or happiness. In her opinion, it was this daily habit that allowed her body, mind, and spirit to stay alive during her years of intense medical treatment.

Action Steps

Many cancer patients—as well as many people who simply hope to prevent cancer—will read a story like Saranne's and doubt that they could create happiness in their lives every day, much less while in the midst of a life-threatening illness. The ugly truth is that many of us are *not* happy—twenty million Americans suffer from some form of depression each year.⁹ What's worse is that millions more are not clinically depressed, yet are deeply bored and unsatisfied with their lives. These emotional states also do nothing to help our immune systems fight off illnesses.

The good news is that, as Saranne discovered, it does not take much effort to bring a bit of happiness into your life, even when you're in the middle of a traumatic cancer journey. It does, however, require consistency, such as Saranne's daily appointment to laugh with her daughter. Just as you won't get physically fit sitting on your couch, you won't increase your happiness by doing nothing. Instead, you have to purposefully try to do things each day that might bring you some amount of happiness or joy. It may feel forced at first, but if you continue with your daily commitment to happiness, the serotonin will soon start flowing more quickly and easily.

Here are some simple suggestions that many Radical Remission survivors have tried in order to increase their positive emotions:

A Prescription for Fun

- *Start every day with a smile or a feeling of gratitude.* To smile, start your day by watching your favorite YouTube video, subscribing to a Joke of the Day e-mail service, or flipping through a photo album (actual or electronic) that makes you smile. Or, to feel gratitude, keep a gratitude journal by your