WE Can, I Can is the campaign theme for this year’s World Cancer Day (Feb 4), which calls for a more focused community agenda in the fight against cancer. The month of March is also dedicated to increasing awareness of colorectal cancer – the number two most common cancer in Malaysia. Hopefully, survivors, their families, related organisations and governments can come together to share the load for cancer control and prevention, and better care for cancer survivors.

With earlier detection and earlier treatments, comes improved survival. However, living indefinitely is not without challenges. Cancer survivors face the risk of secondary cancers, cancer recurrence, other chronic diseases and other ageing-related health challenges. This calls for a lifestyle redesign that survivors can focus on during this period of readjustment to new norms.

At KeepAble Cancer Community in Petaling Jaya, Selangor, we emphasise three community themes of staying active, eating a healthy plant-based diet and targeting a healthy weight for cancer survivors. The Community aims to support cancer survivors, spread awareness of cancer and promote community cancer-related engagement with the public.

Stay active for life
In 2010, a local “stay active for life” study, with a video clip funded by the Union for International Cancer Control, was conducted. This study showed that many survivors had a faulty concept of physical-activity involvement, including a prevailing myth that being active during treatment can cause the cancer to spread more. Quite the contrary, survivors should aim to avoid inactivity and be physically active as much as possible, both during and after treatment. In fact, evidence from international studies provide a strong message that being physically active may lower the risk of death, lessen fatigue, improve stamina and enhance quality of life.
In specific reference to colorectal cancer survivors, the evidence suggests physical activity offers good benefits for longer survival. One study found that walking about five hours a week was linked to lower risk of dying from any cause, and specifically from colorectal cancer. Apart from the many physical and psychosocial side effects of cancer and its treatment, the evidence suggests that survivors also face impaired cognition. Being active helps ameliorate some of these side effects.

The physical activity guidelines for all people, including cancer survivors are as follows:

- **2.5 hours of moderate-intensity physical activity each week** – If you are a cancer survivor, you can join the KeepAble Cancer Community group at 13, Jalan 16/4, Petaling Jaya, every Saturday morning from 8-11.30am for a brisk walk, power walk, reflexology path walk, group qigong or community gardening.

  If engaging in a session of 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity is not feasible, you can break up the duration into several short 10-minute blocks throughout the day to obtain the add-ups over time.

- **Muscle-strengthening exercises two or more days a week**. At KeepAble, you can consciously learn a routine of muscle-strengthening activities during the community gardening. You could also try to use the station gym at parks or join a gym.

- **Cut down sedentary/sitting time** – you can use an alarm clock to remind you not to prolong a session of TV viewing or computer work.

**Go for a healthy plant-based diet**

The evidence suggests that opting for a more plant-based diet (green vegetables, fruits, wholegrains and legumes) may help increase survival of colorectal cancer survivors. A plant-based diet can reduce the risk of cancer and other comorbidities like heart disease, and improve one’s quality of living. So, what is a plant-based diet? Basically, you should have two-thirds of your plate filled with vegetables, legumes, wholegrains and fruits. You can replace refined grains (e.g. white bread) with wholegrains. You should also avoid excess sugar, and this includes all sugar-sweetened beverages, cakes and cookies. Most important, you have to cut down on red and processed meat.

**Target a healthy weight**

Getting to a healthy weight lowers the risk not just of cancer, but also of heart disease, which is common among colorectal cancer survivors. The American Institute of Cancer Research has cautioned that being obese increases the risk of colorectal cancer, along with nine other cancers. Colorectal cancer survivors trying to lose weight must try not to lose too much muscle mass. You must maintain or improve lean body mass by keeping weight loss gradual via appropriate physical activity. You can plan for a 12-week online community gardening activity at KeepAble to help you get started, as well as make new friends and learn about gardening to rehabilitate your cognitive performance. Cancer survivors, especially around the Petaling Jaya area, are welcome to join and participate in the Keepable Cancer Community. Come with your family and join in the fight against cancer, as well as help support fellow cancer survivors towards keeping all survivors able. Participation is free.

Tags: cancer, cancer activity, KeepAble Cancer Community

Available at http://www.star2.com/living/viewpoints/2016/03/14/community-support-for-cancer-patients/