

Stage IV cancer and a fear of a relapse provided the wakeup call to get serious about nutrition. I have always maintained an active lifestyle including running, cycling, and triathlons, but didn't pay too much attention to proper nutrition. As a result, I was in good condition, but carried extra weight and body fat.

The first wakeup call came when I was preparing for the 2011 Salt Lake City Marathon, which would have been my first marathon. Just weeks before the marathon I was diagnosed with Stage IV Burkitt's Lymphoma, a non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma (<http://burkittslymphomasociety.com>).

The week after completing a 20 mile training run I went into the emergency room for abdominal pain. Burkitt's Lymphoma is very rare and spreads very aggressively, with tumors doubling in size within 24 hours, so my condition deteriorated very quickly.

Within a week of being diagnosed I was admitted to the hospital in critical condition with my kidneys failing due to the rapid tumor growth. I was in the hospital for a total of 3 months. Treatment was extremely aggressive, often including 4 chemotherapy treatments per day and chemotherapy treatments to the spinal fluid.

The 2011 marathon was during my first round of treatment. I was very sick and weak, but had made an effort to walk short laps around the nurse's station each day.

The morning of the race at 7 am (the same time the actual race started) I started my "own marathon" of completing 26 laps in the hospital hallway pulling my IV and chemo cart by my side, and wearing my race shirt



and bib along with my hospital gear (gown, mask, and gloves). Although 26 laps was the equivalent of about 2 miles, given how sick I was it took the entire day with several intervals of walking to complete the full 26 laps.

I finished the last lap in the dark hospital hallway at about 10 pm. My marathon of 26 laps and the marathon of battling cancer turned out to be a bigger challenge than completing the actual 26.2 mile marathon.

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According to Finn Petersen, MD, Director of the Intermountain Center for Hematological Malignancies and one of my physicians who cared for me, stated that “those 26 laps required more strength than a real marathon would require. Because of the high dose of chemotherapy Nathan was getting at the time — the strongest dose we administer — it was an incredible feat. Getting through those 26 laps was amazing and inspiring.”

After the first round of treatments as my body responded to chemotherapy I continued to walk every day in the hospital hallways (3-6 miles per day). Even though I wasn't able to compete in the 2011 marathon, I attribute the training for this race as a big factor in saving my life.

Conditioning from training gave strength and mental determination to battle the real marathon of fighting for my life.

A second wakeup call came last December when there was fear of a relapse of the cancer. I experienced abdominal pain similar to the initial pain when being diagnosed. Luckily it was just a scare, but at this point my wife initiated research into lifestyle factors linked to cancer risk and sparked my interest in healthy nutrition.



The honeymoon phase of indulging my new found taste buds was over! It was time to take a more focused approach to paying closer attention to my nutritional health.

Through research and guidance from dietitians at LDS Hospital and TOSH – The Orthopedic Specialty Hospital, and with the tools of the PEHP Waist Aweigh Program, I focused on eating a vegetarian, natural/whole food diet in addition to eliminating refined sugar and other processed foods.

This focus on nutrition has resulted in a loss of 28 pounds and lowering my body fat by over 14 percent in an 8 month period. My overall health goal is to keep the cancer in remission – eating healthy, exercising, and reducing obesity – each reducing the risk of cancer.

With my cancer in remission, and a renewed effort focusing on nutrition and exercise, I slowly worked back into shape – fit enough to complete the 2012 Salt Lake City Marathon a goal initially set for 2011.

In addition to the marathon I went on to compete in several century (100 mile) bike events, an Olympic distant triathlon, and several cyclocross races. A true test of my fitness was completing the Ultimate Challenge – the Tour of Utah Stage 5 ride from Park City to Snowbird covering over 100 miles with 10,000 of elevation gain.

As I was running during the Salt Lake City Marathon and mentally dealing with the pain, I was thinking how there's nothing like cancer and chemotherapy to prepare you to cope with the pain of an endurance race. A marathon is mentally and physically challenging, but it's nowhere as challenging as fighting cancer!

Today, running and cycling are powerful reminders of what I've survived. I felt like the marathon brought a lot of closure with my battle with cancer. I don't take my health for granted anymore. I want to make every day count.

–Nathan Lunstad