



# Simcoe Muskoka Regional Cancer Program Patient and Family Advisory Council (PFAC) Newsletter

The Winter 2022 Edition

## Meet Our Newest PFAC Member: Willa Hart



I am PFAC's newest member and happy for this opportunity to tell you who I am and why I joined PFAC representing the Cancer Centre at RVH.

I have been both a patient at the RVH Cancer Centre and a caregiver to my spouse. It has given me a unique perspective in understanding the needs of patients, families, and caregivers. Along with my personal experience I have also worked in health care for over 20 years as a clinic coordinator in cardiac surgery and as the coordinator for the Cardiac Surgery Residency Program at the University of Toronto. I understand very well how overwhelming and confusing the health care system can be. I have

been a proud advocate for patients and their families for many years. I joined this committee for you and me. I want to continue advocating for patients and understand their needs and those of their caregivers and families. My positive experience at RVH's Cancer Centre and working in health care for many years will help me work with the committee members of PFAC to advocate for you the patient and your families and caregivers.

I am newly retired and, when I am not running after six young grandchildren, I enjoy hiking at the many beautiful trails in Simcoe County and hanging out with my Portuguese Water Dog who has decided her job in life is to worship me.

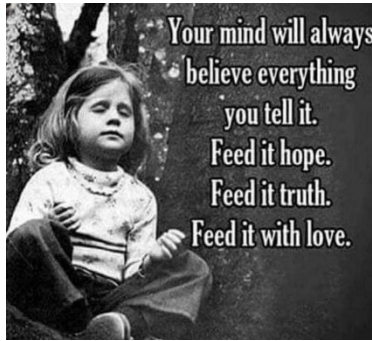
## COVID-19 Vaccine Updates for Cancer Patients

Content written on January 13, 2022.

After January 14, transplant and immunocompromised people are eligible to receive a 4th dose of COVID-19 vaccine. For cancer patients, this includes those who have recently received a transplant, recently or currently having CAR-T-cell therapy, currently receiving chemotherapy, targeted therapy or immunotherapy in the last 3 months. For full details and things to think about when scheduling your vaccine appointment, please visit [www.rvh.on.ca/areas-of-care/cancer-program](http://www.rvh.on.ca/areas-of-care/cancer-program).

If you are not immunocompromised, get all three doses of your COVID-19 vaccine when you are able. Getting all three doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, along with following public health measures, are all great ways to prevent yourself from getting COVID-19 and keeping you and your loved ones safe. It is safe to get your flu shot at the same time as your COVID-19 vaccine.

## A Few Words of Inspiration



I am sharing these words of encouragement which helped me through my chemo, radiation, and many surgeries for breast cancer. I chose to practice daily gratitude. I found this choice truly helped me, especially on some of the hardest times during treatment. I have always been a believer in the power of positivity but there were many days I didn't feel like getting out of bed. I found that if I started listing all the things I was grateful for, it would quickly turn my mindset around.

I recognize everyone's journey with cancer is different, but this is just a little tidbit into how I found the strength to 'Warrior on' and maybe, in some small way, they may help you too!! (By Kelly Blakely, PFAC member)

## Talk to a Dietitian: Meet Megan McConney

**Tapping Into the Power of Your Food** (Interview by Stacey LePage, PFAC member)

It was a pleasure to interview Megan McConney, one of RVH's dietitians, for this winter newsletter.

I had a lot of questions for her and she assured me that these questions were ones that were frequently asked by many cancer patients and caregivers. It seems we are all concerned about how to get the best out of our food.

I went through chemo treatments more than six years ago – that was before Megan's time, but even then, I wanted to be sure that my body had what it needed to repair itself. My oncologist had arranged for me to see a dietitian during one of my chemo treatments – who greeted me with a smile and words of encouragement, not to mention a few suggestions for my diet.

Today, RVH is proud to have Megan as part of our team. She has worked at RVH for close to four years now in both the Cardiac Renal Unit and the Cancer Program. Megan also gained very meaningful experience while working at the Waypoint Centre.

### Meet Megan – In Her Own Words



"I wanted to be a dietitian because I have always loved food and growing up noticed what I ate had a huge influence of how I felt and how I performed in athletic events.

My mom is a nurse in the ICU, and I always loved the idea of working in health care. I knew, however, that I did not have the stomach to become a nurse. When I learned about what a dietitian does, I realigned my high school courses to ensure that I had the proper classes to get into the university program.

I went to Western University to complete a Bachelor of Science, specialization in nutrition and dietetics. After these 4 years, I completed a combined masters and internship program at Western University. My first year focused on courses and a research project on IgG antibodies and irritable bowel disease in pediatrics. My second year consisted of placements with Registered Dietitians in

various fields such as mental health, food service, oncology, ICU, cardiac, Dairy Farmers of Canada and others.

I really enjoy working with cancer patients because I can develop a relationship with many of my patients and watch how changes to their diet can make a difference throughout their cancer journey. Oncology is an ever-changing field and I look forward to what the future brings.

My favourite food is ice cream, specifically ice cream flavours that contain chocolate and peanut butter.”

## How Can a Dietitian Help You?

Dietitians help patients and caregivers to understand what foods would be both beneficial and enjoyable to eat while receiving (and after receiving) treatment. Sometimes treatment can cause some digestive challenges including nausea, a change in the taste of food, a gassy or bloated feeling, diarrhea and/or constipation. While there are many treatment options to help with these challenges, sometimes specific foods can also help.

I have heard a lot about “miracle” diets and foods. I am a skeptic, so I consulted my dietitian about them, and indeed, most of what I had heard was a myth. My dietitian gave me a lot of different suggestions for what I could eat to get the most benefit for any of my digestive challenges.

## Dietitian vs Nutritionist

Dietitians must pass the required undergraduate degree, the practical training, and the licensing exam before they can be called a **Registered Dietitian**. This regulated profession requires an individual to have met both the education and ethical standards set by their regulatory group. Dietitians have the credentials “RD” behind their name.

In Ontario, anyone can call themselves a **Nutritionist** – but there is no provincially regulated standard for their education and training. Consequently, nutritionists do not meet the same education and ethical standards as dietitians.

We employ Registered Dietitians at the Cancer Centre.

## How Can You Talk to an RVH Dietitian?

It’s easy! You can ask anyone on your Care Team to refer you or you can call yourself without a referral at 705 728 9090 x 43520 to book an in-person or virtual visit. Virtual calls make it safe and easy to talk to someone during COVID-19. This call can be either phone or video based.

## What are Some of Your More Frequently Asked Questions? Answers, Please.



**Should I avoid all sugars?** Sugar is a carbohydrate. These are found naturally in fruits, vegetables, grains, and dairy products. Added sugars are simple sugars added to processed foods. Sugar is used by our body for energy. Our cells, whether healthy or cancerous, require energy to grow and the energy comes from the food we eat. *Simply avoiding sugar will not halt cancer cell growth.* Our body will produce energy in other

ways in which the cancerous cells will still be fed. As part of a healthy diet, it is important to limit added sugars in your diet. Completely eliminating sugar is not necessary. Foods such as fruits,

vegetables, dairy, and whole grains all contain natural sugars, but contain many other important and essential nutrients, therefore part of a healthy diet.



**Is frozen food just as good as freshly prepared food?** Frozen food is a great alternative and often cheaper alternative to fresh. Often foods are flash frozen at the point of harvest, locking in their nutrients. Be careful when thawing/cooking frozen foods as you can often lose a lot of the nutrients as they are thawed. I love adding frozen fruits/vegetables to my smoothies, soups, and stir-

fries. In these cases, I am eating the entire product so know I am not missing out on any important nutrients that these products offer.



**Do I need to avoid fast – foods including burgers and fries? I get**

**cravings.** Having fast food as a treat, occasionally, is completely acceptable. When we have cravings, it is sometimes best to satisfy your cravings - otherwise it can leave you unsatisfied and looking for an alternative. This can often lead to overeating. Know your limits. If you crave fast food every day, it is not reasonable to satisfy this craving daily.

Sometimes when we are thirsty, we misinterpret this as being hungry. Make sure you stay hydrated and drink lots of water throughout the day.

**How do I deal with my constipation?** When dealing with constipation, fibre and fluids are your friend. There are two types of fibre. Soluble fibre is found in beans, lentils, and some fruit and vegetables. Soluble fibre dissolves in water and turns into a thick gel. This helps to keep you regular by bulking and thickening your poop. Insoluble fibre is found in the skins of vegetables and fruit and the bran portion of whole grains. This fibre stimulates movement within the intestine which results in a bowel movement. When eating more fibre, make sure to increase your fluid intake as this helps the fibre work better and prevents gas, bloating, and diarrhea.

**Are there any trusted resources/recipes designed with cancer patients in mind?**

Cook for Your Life  
<https://www.cookforyourlife.org/>

Canada's NEW Food Guide  
<https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>

Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Centre  
<https://www.mskcc.org/>

Dana Farber Cancer Institute  
<https://www.dana-farber.org/>

Nourish [www.nourishonline.ca](http://www.nourishonline.ca)

BC Cancer Agency's Nutrition Information  
<http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/health-info/coping-with-cancer/nutrition-support>.

UnlockFood.ca (Dietitians of Canada)  
[www.unlockfood.ca](http://www.unlockfood.ca)

Telehealth Ontario. Get phone-based nutrition advice from a Registered Dietitian by calling 1-866-797-0000

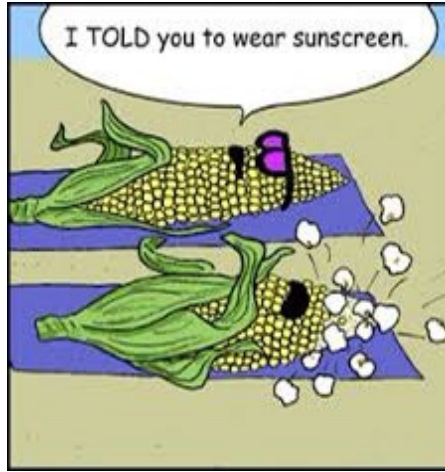
Image credits: sugar photo created by jcomp - [www.freepik.com](http://www.freepik.com). Frozen blackberry and fresh blackberry photo created by azerbaijan\_stockers - [www.freepik.com](http://www.freepik.com). Hamburger photo by Shutterstock75 from Pixabay.

## A Little Bit of Humour to Nourish a Giggle...

The definition of empathy...



This one's a little "corny".



No need to explain...



## Yummy, Cheesy Broccoli Soup Recipe

There were times, when I was just out of chemo, when nothing had a taste other than "metal". It simply was not fun to eat. Anything tomato-based hurt my stomach. I turned to creamy things with lots of flavour and colour. We eat with our eyes, right? Soup was my comfort food. My favorite was from RVH's Café Royale: spicy chicken and rice curry. For some reason, my stomach tolerated it well. Other than that, made my own soup. This broccoli soup recipe is still at the top of my list. Hope you try it – and enjoy it as much as I do. (Stacey LePage)

<p><b>Step 1.</b></p> <p>Fry these ingredients together until you reach the "tenderness" you like.</p> <p>¼ cup butter</p> <p>½ cup diced onions</p> <p>1 cup shredded carrot (for looks)</p> <p>1/ ½ cups broccoli flowerets</p>	<p><b>Step 2.</b></p> <p>To thicken, remove from heat and add ¼ cup flour. Let it cook for less than 30 seconds so that the flour taste has somewhat "cooked off". Then, while still off heat whisk in:</p> <p>1/ ½ cups chicken broth</p> <p>1 cup milk</p> <p>1 cup whipped cream (because why not indulge on occasion?)</p>	<p><b>Step 3.</b></p> <p>Put mixture back on heat and add:</p> <p>1/ ½ tsp salt</p> <p>½ tsp pepper (or to taste)</p> <p>2 cups shredded cheddar cheese (and sometimes I add a different cheese I have left in the fridge)</p> <p>Cook until cheese is melted. Do NOT let the soup boil.</p> <p>Enjoy! Store in a mason jar in the fridge.</p>
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Got feedback or ideas for future issues of the PFAC newsletter? Email [nsmscreening@rvh.on.ca](mailto:nsmscreening@rvh.on.ca).