

# The Washington Post

## After Cancer and Chemo, What's So Hard About a Little 13.1-Mile Run?

Marlyn Glickman and Michele Conley don't seem as though they'd have a lot in common. Glickman, 59, had until recently never run a mile outdoors in her life. Conley, 46, went to college on a volleyball scholarship. Glickman, by her own admission, had allowed her body and diet to get seriously out of shape by middle age, while Conley has always maintained a high state of fitness and eaten very healthfully.

### THIS STORY

But in fact the two have a great deal in common. Both have survived breast cancer. Both have used that experience as incentive to embrace life more fully.

And both have just finished running a half-marathon in New York's Central Park.

For Glickman, who lives in Rockville, the run was a physical challenge that symbolized her approach to facing life's inevitable hurdles. For Conley, of Chevy Chase, taking part in *More* magazine's 13.1-mile race was a hoot, a celebration of companionship with other women who've been through what she's been through and come out smiling.

I learned about Glickman and Conley through Pamela Peeke, a Bethesda-based physician, diet-and-fitness guru and best-selling author of "Body for Life for Women." Peeke was enlisted by *More* to coach a group of cancer survivors from across the country, preparing them for the run and accommodating the special concerns facing a woman who wants to lace up her sneakers even while still under treatment.

Glickman, who co-owns a consulting company with her husband, met Peeke 15 years ago. As she approached her 45th birthday, Glickman says, "I was in horrible condition, 60 pounds overweight. I thought I was doing well by cutting back on fat, but I was eating a box of fat-free cookies at a time. Not the proper nutrition, by any means. I really needed to get myself back in shape."

Peeke helped Glickman eat more consciously and healthfully, primarily through keeping a journal in which Glickman says she recorded "everything I put in my mouth." Glickman was pleased as she

watched those 60 pounds disappear. "I thought of it as 'weight removal,'" Glickman says. "If I 'lost' it, I'd always find it, before."

At age 52, she received a diagnosis of breast cancer. "Here I went to the effort to take care of myself and still got cancer, she says. "I was a little upset."

But getting herself in

shape turned out to help her endure lumpectomy and chemotherapy. "I had learned to take care of myself," she says. "If I hadn't known how to eat properly by that point, I would have gone back to my old habits and been in even worse shape." That attitude kept her going after a second cancer in the same breast led her to a mastectomy.

Conley was 35 when she learned she had breast cancer. "I was always super, super athletic, and also a really healthy eater," she says. She'd also had her babies early and breast-fed all four, both things that are supposed to offer protection against breast cancer. When her oncologist told her the lump in her breast was malignant, she said, "I don't get it. This doesn't make sense."

But Conley, a State Farm insurance agent, didn't dwell on her misfortune for long. Largely for the sake of her kids, she resolved to meet her cancer head-on. Her doctor introduced her to Peeke, who advised her on nutrition and recommended that she take such supplements as flaxseed and



The half-marathon team included, from left, Marlyn Glickman, Roseanne Jahnke, coach Pamela Peeke, Michele Conley, Bonnie Liebovich, Sharon Harrison and Jane Hildebrandt. (By Sean Sullivan)

lump was discovered six years ago. Conley decided she wanted to be "done with this" and opted for a bilateral mastectomy and a hysterectomy. Then she went about starting the Living in Pink Foundation, which raises money for breast cancer research (and for which Peeke is the volunteer medical adviser).

"You've got to turn it into something good," Conley says.

Peeke had just 16 weeks to get her team in shape for the half-marathon. The women were at various stages in their cancer journeys; some were still on medications such as tamoxifen, which Peeke says "puts on belly weight."

"Women's body composition shifts and changes over time," even without cancer, Peeke notes. "We lose lean body mass or muscle." The rigors of cancer treatment add to the challenge: Surgery, chemotherapy and radiation can sap strength and the will to do much beyond surviving. Hard training, especially in warm weather, can dehydrate the body and alter the effect of post-cancer medications.

fish oil and drink large amounts of water to help get rid of the toxins from chemotherapy.

Beyond that, Conley credits Peeke's stress-management counseling for helping her to accept adversity as part of life, and to move on. Conley had to draw on Peeke's lessons again when a second

A frequent marathon runner herself, Peeke focused not only on physical training but also on revamping the women's diets. "Many women tend to prefer carbs to protein," she observes. For peak physical performance, though, you need both carbohydrates as fuel and protein to rebuild muscle, she says. She had her teammates eat every three to four hours throughout the day, consuming a mix of proteins and carbs — with the latter composed mostly of fruits and vegetables, along with whole grains such as oatmeal, whole-wheat pasta, brown rice, quinoa and barley.

One of the team's favorites, she says, was reduced-fat peanut butter spread on a whole-wheat pita, maybe with a dollop of blueberry preserves or jam. "That will power you through a good hour and a half of strenuous activity." For post-workout snacks, Peeke suggests yogurt with almond slices or walnuts, a fruit smoothie with whey protein powder, hummus and carrots or half a turkey sandwich. Peeke encourages intake of healthy fats such as olive oil and avocado; they not only are good sources of energy but also help immune function, which is particularly vital to those recovering from cancer. Finally, she says, caffeine is well documented as a performance enhancer and helps use body fat to its best advantage.

Speaking with me by phone just after returning home from their half-marathon, Peeke, Glickman and Conley all still sounded pumped up. Glickman told me that, with her 60th birthday around the corner, "I'm really happy to be here." Conley said, "I just enjoyed the journey of it. . . . It was the company of the people I met. Their stories inspire me."

As for Peeke, she said: "A marathon — or half-marathon — is a metaphor for the feeling that 'If you can get over this, you can get over anything.' These women have done it the opposite way. They've already been through the 'anything' in life. They said, 'If I could get through chemo, then I can handle that hill.'"

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— Jennifer LaRue Huget, *Washington Post* Staff Writer