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**Cancer Treatments Kill Not Cure, Friends Say**

**DEAR DR. ROACH: I have a relative with cancer who is about to begin multiple therapeutic interventions. My friends tell me that all cancer treatments are toxic and kill people instead of curing them, and that I should tell my relative to look into other forms of treatment. What do you suggest I do? – K.C.**

ANSWER: There are hundreds of different types of cancer, and they vary widely in their capacity to grow and damage the individual, and in their response to treatment. For decades, this has meant mostly surgery, chemotherapy and radiation, but now includes newer treatments, including immune therapy. While not all cancers are curable in everybody, every year brings sometimes incremental, sometimes dramatic improvements in life expectancy for

individual cancers. Some cancers that were rapidly fatal even a few years ago are now curable in most cases. Getting the right diagnosis quickly and getting to an expert in treating that cancer are critical to having the best chance of a good outcome.

Treating some cancers remains difficult, and in many cases the treatments have significant side effects. Surgery scars may impair function, and chemotherapy can cause severe symptoms and may permanently affect body systems, as can radiation. It can be very hard on a family member observing these treatments, and if his or her loved one nevertheless succumbs eventually to the cancer, it is understandable to think the suffering the person went through was in vain.

So, while I understand where your friends may be coming from, their well-meaning advice, based on bad experiences possibly a long time ago, might cause your relative with cancer to delay the potentially lifesaving treatments that are available now. A study published in July 2018 showed that people who use alternative medical treatments for cancer are less likely to be cured and have a shorter life expectancy.

My advice is that you encourage your relative to find the most expert cancer treatment available. It's up to your relative to accept the recommendations of the expert, but delaying the best available treatment in order to consider unproven therapies is likely to result in harm.

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**DEAR DR. ROACH: I have had the**

**same problem forever: I don't understand why buttermilk coffee creamer seems to get outdated faster than regular creamer. Does the butter in it have anything to do with this? -- C.H.**

ANSWER: Buttermilk doesn't have butter in it. It was so named because it was originally made with what was left after separating butter from the unhomogenized cream that had been allowed to ferment with airborne bacteria, making it slightly acidic. Modern cultured buttermilk is made from pasteurized, homogenized milk, usually 1% to 2% fat, and inoculated with healthy bacteria, which makes lactic acid from the sugars in the milk. This acid makes buttermilk resistant to the unhealthy bacteria that causes spoilage. It also causes a slight sour taste, which some people like and others don't.

Commercial heavy cream, and coffee creamers made from heavy cream, have a very long shelf life largely because they are pasteurized at ultra-high temperatures, so they last even longer than buttermilk. The high fat content also retards bacteria growth.

Both buttermilk-based and cream-based creamers will stay good longer than their expiration date. Your nose is very good for telling when it has gone bad.

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*Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to [ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu](mailto:ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu).*

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