

Scars: A Warrior's Beauty Mark

Written By: Mandi Milecki

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coolkidscampaign.org

Valentine's Day 2019 began a tough year for our family. Our 17-month-old son, Christopher, was diagnosed with AML-M7. The doctors said his cancer was rare and needed aggressive, swift treatment. He would later endure two brain surgeries, four rounds of chemo, radiation, and a bone marrow transplant. Cancer sent all of us on the craziest rollercoaster, myself into what I like to call my own stages of grief.

I'd already been through the shock, denial and bartering phases. But now it was July and I was stuck in the anger phase. I was angry that Christopher had been dealing with multiple infections (norovirus, central line infection, C-diff, and adenovirus to name a few) and was in significant pain. But I was mostly angry that no one could tell me if his treatment plan was going to work.

Later that night, I received a message. It was from a woman named Crystal, who has a daughter named Stella. Stella had the same

cancer and treatment plan as my son. Crystal would go on to share their experiences while Stella was in treatment and connect us with other families in the pediatric cancer community. There was much comfort in speaking with someone who understands the most intimate details (you know, the ones that are too "real" for social media) like no one else can. She not only offered a "peek" into what the future could hold for Christopher, but she offered me hope.

Crystal taught me that there is a huge, meaningful community that can help guide you through this "new normal." There is a saying amongst us warrior parents, *"Never be ashamed of a scar, it simply means you were stronger than whatever tried to hurt you."* *Because scar tissue is stronger than regular tissue, here's to realizing your own strength.* But if you're stuck, reach out. Like Crystal, I will be here for you too.





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ABOUT THIS ISSUE...

Our Fall edition is all about change and ways of dealing with it. A child's cancer diagnosis impacts the entire family. It's important to know that there is no "right way" of dealing with it. You might feel stuck in anger; you might need to learn to accept help from others; or you might need some simple, practical coping strategies such as music therapy or meditation. This edition contains articles that address all of these topics. We also included some great recipes and nutrition information from our friends at Weis Markets because staying physically strong is also key to well-being.

We hope you find this edition's content helpful and that you know you are not alone. You are part of a large and caring community – we're here for you!

Sincerely,
All of Us at Cool Kids Campaign



FALL IN LOVE WITH *Fall Produce*

Kimberly Asman, RDN and Taylor Simpson, MS, RDN, LDN
Registered Dietitians at Weis Markets

Fruits and vegetables are high in vitamins, minerals and fiber, which make them a nutritious addition to your meals and snacks. Eating plenty of produce may also help reduce inflammation. Seasonal produce are fruits and vegetables that are at their peak harvest or flavor during certain seasons. Choosing seasonal items can help reduce cost, increase flavor, and increase nutrition. Below we highlight some of Fall's best fruits and vegetables and tips for selecting, storing, and preparing them.



APPLES are sweet, crunchy, delicious and versatile. Apples should be stored in the refrigerator away from strong smelling foods. They can be eaten raw and paired with a dip like peanut butter, used in a salad, baked into a dessert, and more. They are also a great source of vitamins A and C and fiber.

SPINACH is full of nutrients including vitamins A and K, manganese, iron, calcium and magnesium. Unwashed spinach should be kept in the refrigerator for up to 4 days. Always wash produce before serving. Spinach tastes excellent sautéed in a bit of olive oil, and makes a great addition to salads, stuffing, omelets, pasta dishes, soups and smoothies.

SWEET POTATOES are in peak season October through December and are full of beta carotene, vitamin C and potassium. They contain anti-inflammatory nutrients. Store sweet potatoes for up to two weeks but do not refrigerate them. They can be cooked in a variety of different ways. Sweet potatoes can be cut into wedges and baked, baked whole, mashed, or cubed and sautéed. Sliced sweet potatoes can also be used for a fun twist on nachos, when you bake them in the oven and top with cheese, black beans, bell pepper, and salsa.

BROCCOLI is a tasty vegetable that is full of antioxidants that help to protect the body against disease. It is an excellent source of vitamins C and K, chromium, and folate. Choose broccoli that is deep green and crisp. Avoid choosing broccoli that is limp or rubbery. Store broccoli wrapped in plastic wrap or in a plastic bag in the refrigerator for up to a week. It can be enjoyed raw, steamed, stir-fried or roasted. Broccoli makes a nice addition to pasta or rice dishes too.

BUTTERNUT SQUASH is in peak season during the fall and winter months. It is rich in potassium, fiber, vitamins A and C, and manganese. It has a high antioxidant content which can promote anti-inflammatory effects. To select a butternut squash, look for one that has tight skin and that is free from soft spots and blemishes. Whole butternut squash stored in a cool dark place is good for up to one month or cut and refrigerated squash is good for up to 5 days. To prepare a butternut squash, you can microwave it for 2-3 minutes to make it easier to cut in half lengthwise. Once cut, remove seeds and excess fiber from the middle of the squash. The skin is edible but can be peeled. Then you are ready to cut into desired size pieces and incorporate into soups and stews, or roast on a sheet pan and serve as a side or as a topping on a salad.



Sweet Potato Nachos

INGREDIENTS:

- Nonstick cooking spray
- 3 medium sweet potatoes, sliced ¼-inch-thick crosswise (about 2 lbs.)
- 2 tablespoons Weis Quality Olive Oil
- ½ teaspoon Weis Quality Ground Cumin
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 cup shredded Weis Quality Reduced Fat Yellow Cheddar and/or Pepper Jack cheese
- 1 can (10 ounces) Weis Quality Diced Tomatoes & Green Chilies, drained
- 1 cup fresh or frozen corn kernels, thawed if necessary
- ¾ cup drained and rinsed Weis Quality No Salt Added Black Beans
- 3 green onions, thinly sliced
- 1 ripe avocado, peeled, pitted and thinly sliced
- Coarsely chopped fresh cilantro for garnish (optional)

DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 450°; line rimmed baking sheet with aluminum foil and spray with cooking spray.
2. In a large bowl, toss potatoes, oil, cumin, salt and pepper; spread on prepared baking sheet. Bake potatoes 30 minutes or until crisp, flipping once. Top potatoes with cheese, tomatoes, corn and beans; bake 5 minutes or until cheese melts. Makes about 8 cups.
3. Serve nachos topped with onions and avocado garnished with cilantro, if desired.

Approximate nutritional values per serving: 272 Calories, 14g Fat (4g Saturated), 14mg Cholesterol, 431mg Sodium, 29g Carbohydrates, 6g Fiber, 3g Sugars, 0g Added Sugars, 9g Protein

POMEGRANATES are in peak season September through February. They are rich in antioxidants and offer vitamins A and C, folic acid, and fiber. When selecting a pomegranate, look for one with tight skin and that is heavy for its size. Pomegranates can be stored in the refrigerator for 3-4 weeks. There are many ways to remove pomegranate arils (seeds). One method is to cut the top off of the pomegranate, cut the pomegranate into sections by using a knife along where the white membrane is. Using a bowl of water, submerge sections in the bowl and massage arils loose. This method allows for pieces of membrane to float to the top and helps keep arils in one place. You can eat pomegranate arils as is or toss into salads, yogurt, and smoothies.



Roasted Squash, Pomegranate, & Arugula Salad

INGREDIENTS:

- 3 cups diced butternut squash
- ¼ cup Weis Quality Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- 1/2 teaspoon Weis Quality Iodized Salt
- ¼ teaspoon Weis Quality Black Pepper
- ¼ cup sliced almonds
- 2 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon Weis Quality 100% Pure Honey
- 1 package (5 ounces) Weis Organics Baby Arugula
- ¼ cup fresh pomegranate arils

DIRECTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 450°. Line a rimmed baking pan with parchment paper. In a large bowl, toss squash, 1 tablespoon oil, ¼ teaspoon salt and 1/8 teaspoon pepper; spread on prepared pan. Roast squash 20 minutes or until tender.
2. In a large skillet, toast almonds over medium heat 3 minutes or until lightly browned and fragrant, stirring frequently; transfer to plate to cool.
3. In a small bowl, whisk lemon juice, honey, and remaining 3 tablespoons oil, ¼ teaspoon salt and 1/8 teaspoon pepper. Makes about 6 tablespoons.
4. In same large bowl, toss arugula, roasted squash and lemon juice mixture. Serve salad topped with pomegranate arils and almonds.

Approximate nutritional values per serving (serves 8): 112 Calories, 8g Fat (1g Saturated), 0mg Cholesterol, 153mg Sodium, 9g Carbohydrates, 2g Fiber, 4g Sugars, 2g Protein

JUST BREATHE Meditation for Adults and Kids

- chopra.com

Breathe in, breathe out.

That's a phrase you've probably heard before. It's a part of the peace-inducing practice of meditation. According to the University of Rochester Medical Center, "Worry, anxiety, and stress can be more than distractions. Constantly replaying in your mind daily problems and fears can affect your mental and physical health." One of the most common holistic practices to reduce these worries is meditation.

Janet Griffin, owner of the website A Path for Change (apath4change.com), is a meditation expert that speaks volumes on the power of meditation for healing purposes.

"It's about bringing your body into the now," Griffin shared. "Anytime you are able to do that, it will automatically bring someone's anxiety down, blood pressure down, all of that stuff because in the moment all those fears about the future and all that grief from the past doesn't exist. That's one of the major things that people get out of it."

The University of Rochester Medical Center's website shared that the benefits of meditation include lower blood pressure, decreased pain, better immune system and a better mood and brain function.

But this isn't a skill that just anyone can expect to master quickly. Griffin said that learning meditation to benefit one's body and mind will take practice. Meditation can range from mindfulness meditation to moving meditation that includes yoga, tai chi and walking meditation.

Griffin shared that early on in her studies, she was guided by a teacher that changed her view on meditation.

"I was told early on in meditation practice by a teacher that meditation would change my life. Just the simple act of meditating would change my life and she was correct," she said. "She was just teaching us how to stop and suspend, focused into the present moment. And I really think anyone can do that."

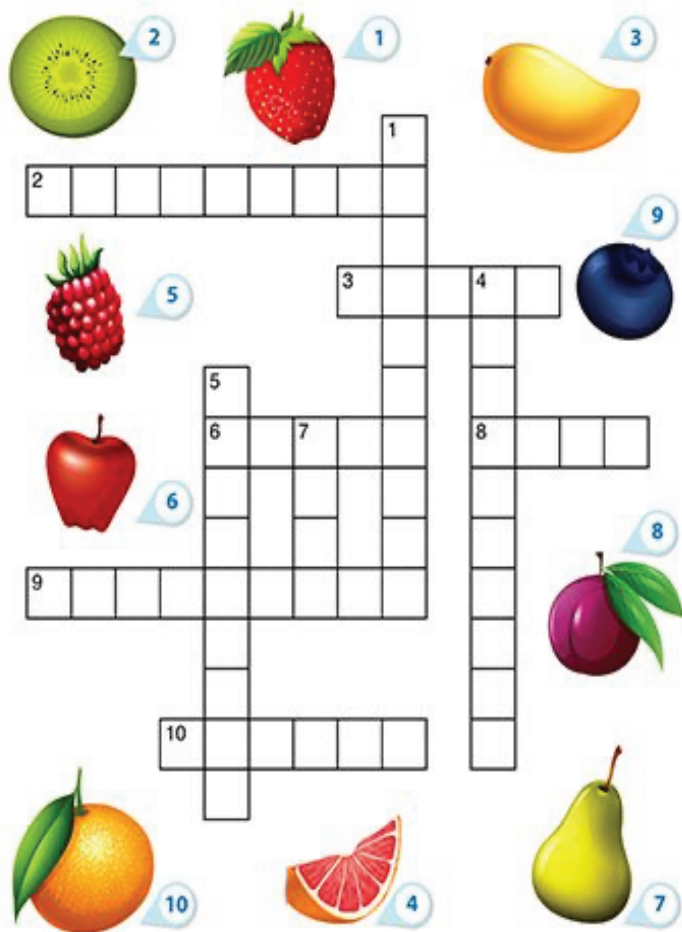
If anyone can learn meditation, there's no stopping parents from practicing meditation with their children. Websites like chopra.com share meditation practices that parents can work on with children, like "The Balloon."

- *"Relax your body and begin to take deep inhales and slow exhales through the nose."*
- *"Start to take a slow, deep breath to fill your belly up with air, as if you're trying to blow up a big balloon. Expand your belly as much as you can."*
- *"Slowly let the air out of the balloon (through the nose) as you release the breath from the belly."*
- *"Encourage your kids to feel their entire body relax each time they exhale, each time air is slowly being released from the balloon. You can even make a 'hissing' noise to encourage them to slow down the exhale even more, 'Like letting air out of the balloon.'"*
- *"Continue for several minutes."*



PUZZLES AND GAMES

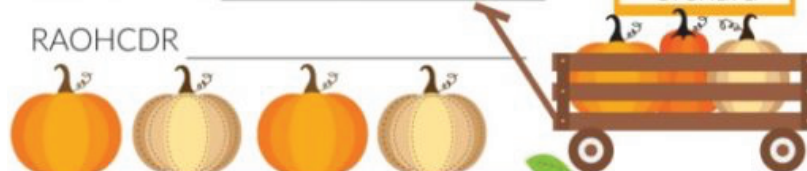
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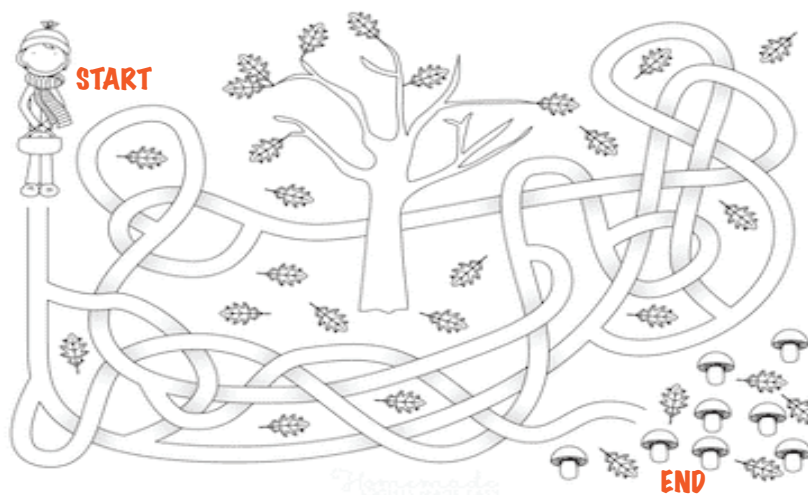
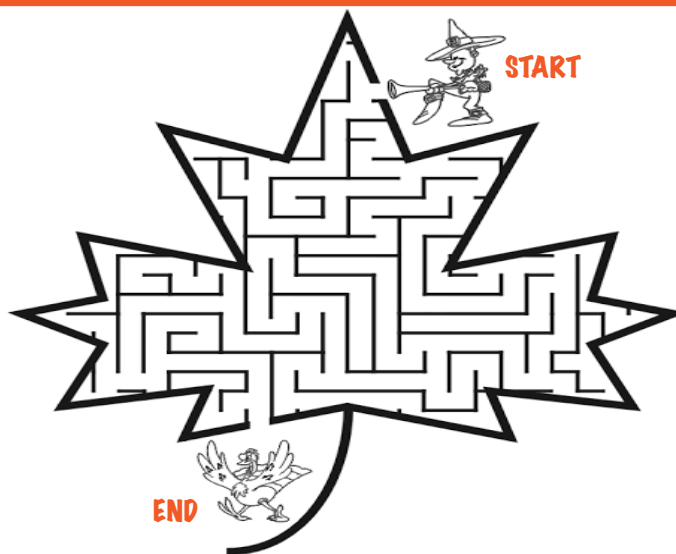
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WORD BANK
 pumpkin
 leaf
 trees
 football
 Halloween
 apples
 squash
 corn
 autumn
 acorn
 bonfire
 hayride
 harvest
 orchard



COMPLETE THE MAZES



Brain in the Teasers

I SPY THANKSGIVING

COUNT HOW MANY OF EACH ITEM IS IN THE PICTURE AND WRITE THAT NUMBER ON THE LINES AT THE BOTTOM.

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FUN FACTS!

Did you know...



A cat has 32 muscles in each ear.

A crocodile cannot stick its tongue out.

A dime has 118 ridges around the edge.



It is physically impossible for pigs to look up into the sky.



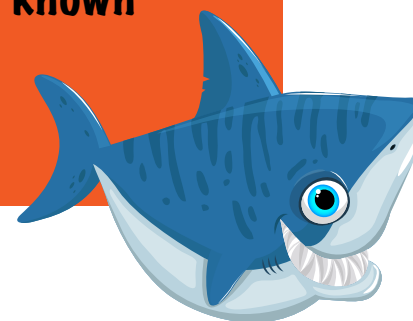
In the course of an average lifetime, while sleeping you might eat around 70 assorted insects and 10 spiders, or more.

If you sneeze too hard, you could fracture a rib.



An ostrich's eye is bigger than its brain.

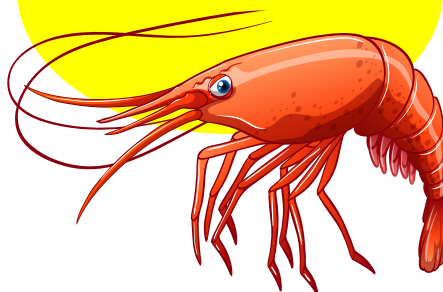
A shark is the only known fish that can blink with both eyes.



Almonds are a member of the peach family.



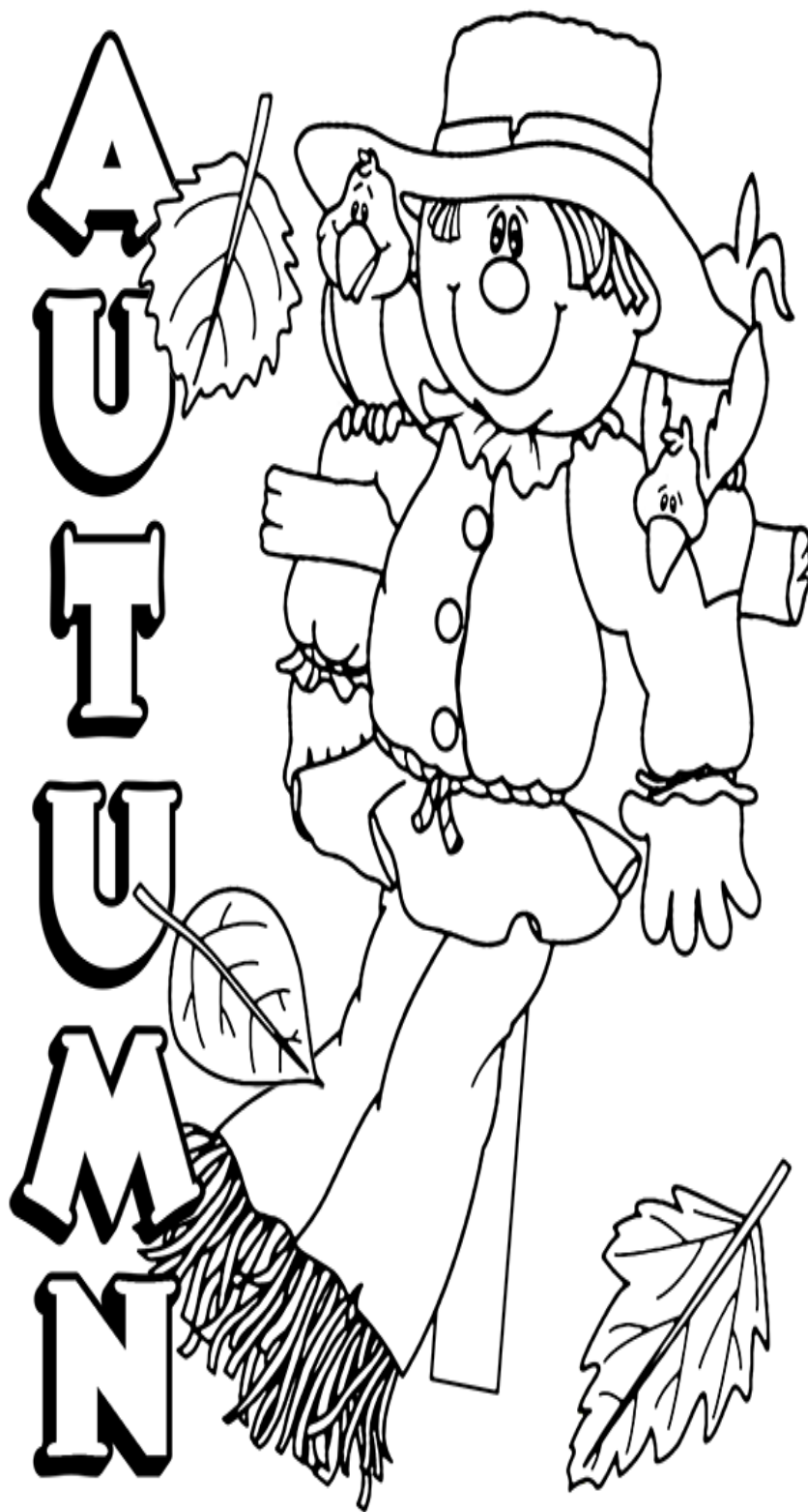
A shrimp's heart is in its head.



Like fingerprints, everyone's tongue print is different.

It is impossible for most people to lick their own elbow. (try it!)

FALL COLOR





How Listening to Music May Ease Traumatic Stress

*Adapted from an article published by International Arts + Mind Lab (IAM Lab),
a multidisciplinary research-to-practice initiative accelerating the field of neuroaesthetics.*



When our lives are disrupted by the stress of a traumatic experience, like a child's cancer diagnosis, our mental health can be compromised. The constant disruption in our routines, the reality of a loved one being ill, and the overall uncertainty of the situation makes it difficult for the mind to remain in a healthy, balanced state.

Stress is something we deal with as a daily part of our lives and isn't always harmful. Traumatic stress, however, can have negative and lasting psychological impacts and, at its extreme, can manifest as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Thankfully, everyone—kids, adults, elders, first responders and essential workers—can use music to boost their ability to cope with stress and inoculate them from the downstream negative effects of living through a traumatic experience like the pandemic.

Your Brain and Body on Music

Listening to music that you personally enjoy reduces physiological symptoms of stress, lowering heart rate and blood pressure and decreasing the production of stress-related hormones like cortisol. Music's calming effect helps us shift away from "fight-or-flight" stress responses by activating our parasympathetic nervous system, allowing us to conserve energy, rest and replenish. By bringing us back to a healthy baseline, music can put us in a better frame of mind with the power to alleviate psychological symptoms of nervousness, restlessness and feelings of worry. Listening to music can be such a powerful stress reliever that when used before, during, or after surgery as an intervention, it significantly reduces patient pain and anxiety.

Perhaps the most potent part of music is that it's pleasurable. The joy music brings us activates reward circuitry in our brains, bathing our minds in feel-good neurotransmitters like dopamine, which can lift our mood and help us process complex emotions.

How to Get Started Listening to Music for Greater Health

Using music to maintain your mental health right now is very simple. Turn on the radio, stream your favorite tracks, sing in the shower, hum a tune. The beauty of music is that it's readily available from the comfort of your own home. The healing power of music cannot be contained.

Here are some new ways to listen to your favorite music:

#SongsOfComfort with Yo-Yo Ma



BET COVID-19 Relief Effort for communities of color



#ShowerSongs with Josh Groban



Facebook LIVE Berkner Breaks for the kids



Musicians on Call healing playlists



One World: Together At Home Special to Celebrate COVID-19 Workers





"It is Cancer." - A Story From Jessica Lalas

"It is cancer." Three simple words that turned our lives upside down. Charlotte was a healthy one year old. She had just mastered walking, was beginning to talk and was really enjoying exploring the world around her but then in an instant all of that changed.

On July 19, 2019 we went in to see Charlotte's primary care physician for her one year well check. She got her full exam, a hand full of shots and some routine lab work that our pediatrician likes to do. We left that appointment being told "She looks amazing, you both are doing great as first-time parents."

A few days later I dropped Charlotte off to daycare and had just gotten to my office at work when I received a call from the doctor's office. As soon as I heard the voice on the other end of the line, I immediately knew this wasn't a normal call: it was the actual pediatrician, not a nurse.

Charlotte's labs were abnormal and she wanted to repeat them as soon as possible. I immediately called my husband to tell him I was leaving work to go get Charlotte to have her labs repeated. I told him I didn't think he needed to leave work but God quickly intervened and lead him to meet me at the doctor's office

While holding Charlotte in my arms and rubbing her fuzzy blonde hair against my chin she gave us the results of the original labs: her hemoglobin and white blood count were off and they found leukemic cells in her blood.

I immediately started to cry and just hug Charlotte as tight as possible. I can still feel her 19 pound body against my chest and her soft hair against my face. Thankfully my husband was with me and started to ask questions. I don't remember much but she wanted to repeat the labs and if they were abnormal we would be sent straight to UNC to follow-up. The emotions all set in that day. I cried, I screamed, I was angry, I was sad, I was confused.

Just a few hours later we got the call that her labs were still abnormal so they were already working on a referral to UNC's pediatric hematology and oncology clinic. At that point we were still hopefully it was something other than cancer so we spent the next day "normal" awaiting her appointment the following day. Charlotte went to daycare and my husband and I

both went to work. Little did I know that would be her very last day at daycare and my last day at work.

July 25, 2019 we woke up early and made the hour drive to UNC. That day was filled with so many emotions as we waited, talked to doctors, waited, talked to more doctors and waited some more. Around 2:00 that afternoon we heard the words "it is cancer." She has B Cell Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia. By that point we were ready to fight and that is exactly what we have done every day since!

We spent 7 days inpatient to begin her journey to beating this. She had a lumbar puncture to check her spinal fluid for leukemic cells, a bone marrow aspirate to confirm her type of leukemia and a port-a-cath placed in her chest to receive her chemo. We reviewed the treatment plan and learned this journey would last almost 2.5 years but also that our lives would never be the same.

Charlotte has received multiple red blood transfusions, hundreds of doses of chemo of multiple kinds, countless sedations and lumbar punctures and has spent more days than we can count in the outpatient cancer clinic at UNC.

The one thing I wasn't prepared for were a lot of the side effects. I knew she would lose her hair and she would have issues with nausea and vomiting but it's so much more than that. Within the first two weeks she lost her ability to walk, sit unassisted, crawl and basically became an infant physically.



She regressed cognitively and her speech basically stopped other than a couple of basic words. Her taste buds changed and she wanted very specific foods all the time while on steroids. We had to stop our social life due to her weakened immune system which meant no holidays with family, no birthday parties, no trips to the zoo, no grocery store trips, etc. When they say “cancer changes everything” they aren’t exaggerating but with lots of support and prayers we have made it through the first 13.5 months of treatment and Charlotte is doing incredible. As I sit and write this she is outside jumping in her bounce house with a head full of blonde hair and is so full of life!

One of the biggest lessons I personally have learned through this is to take nothing for granted! Enjoy the mess of kids, enjoy the screaming, enjoy the energy, enjoy the grocery store trips, enjoy the tantrums, etc. I can specifically remember many days where I prayed so hard for her to feel well enough to throw a tantrum, to make a mess of my house and to fight bedtime because she was full of energy.

If you ever find yourself in our shoes accept the help, humble yourself and know that people want to help! We have survived because of the love and support of our friends, family and community. We created an amazon wish list, allowed friends to do fundraisers and have accepted most any other help others have offered.

Our house is overrunning with toys and gifts but that is a constant physical reminder for all 3 of us that we are so loved and there are so many people praying us through this journey! Now

we are counting down the 381 days Charlotte has left of treatment and praying COVID is under control by then so we can finally celebrate holidays with family, do all the things families with toddlers do, go eat in restaurants and give our support system the biggest hugs ever to thank them for getting us to this point

If you are in our shoes know that we are praying for you and your family and would love to offer our support in any way possible!

With Love,

Brent, Jessica and Charlotte Lalaas
NC Cool Kid family



Charlotte loves flamingos. Her friends and families “flocked” her yard with flamingos one day and Charlotte spent the entire morning hugging each flamingo. They also created a Charlotte Strong t-shirt fundraiser featuring a flamingo.

Cool Kids CAMPAIGN®

Send us your stories, art,
poetry, and photos and become
a published writer or artist!



Cami, Relapsed Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia

Email all submissions to:
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