



MH CELEBRITY FITNESS

Lance Armstrong: Hero of Health and Fitness

The cycling legend waged a war against cancer. Here's how you can learn from him

By: Jeff O'Connell

Lance Armstrong was conscripted to fight in the war against cancer. "I had no choice," he says. "I was attacked by it back in '96, so it's been part of my life for 12 years." Even before he finished the first leg of a storied bicycling career, he had formed the Lance Armstrong Foundation to help combat a disease that kills about 560,000 Americans a year.

Especially in light of his recently announced comeback, the tempting metaphor casts Armstrong's battle against cancer as an extension of his racing career: the dogged determination, the triumph over long odds, the unflinching focus on victory—in this case, a cure. Only it's not. "This is different from a race, where there were start and finish lines," he says. "You can look at the success we've had with testicular cancer and say, 'Okay, we're ahead in that one area.' But cancer is a six-letter word that encompasses more than 200 different diseases."

The United States has spent billions waging war against cancer, but Armstrong contends we're not getting our money's worth. So Armstrong's foundation directs its \$40-million-a-year budget—much coming in lunch-money increments and from people who accessorize with yellow wristbands—to where it counts the most: improving the lives of those individuals stricken with the deadly disease.

When you see Armstrong during his break from competitive cycling, it's liable to be on the pages of a tabloid, strolling with some beauty. The tour de Lance takes in some pretty scenery. But the paparazzi can't be bothered following him through cancer wards, where he helps, inspires, but most of all, listens to the patients' stories.

His humanitarian effort isn't the brainchild of his PR sherpas; it comes from knowing firsthand how it feels to live with a death sentence. Which also accounts for his outrage. "I'm surprised almost every day that this country isn't more appalled at the devastation cancer creates," he says over his cellphone, as he pulls into a parking lot for another hospital visit. "Not every few days, but every friggin' day, 1,500 Americans die from this bastard of a disease. Let's cut that number in half, and then we can talk progress," says Armstrong. "We can do that."

TAKE-HOME LESSON

To beat cancer, we need to focus more on prevention, Armstrong says. If you smoke, stop. Even if you don't, reduce your risk of 17 cancers, including prostate, by boosting your body's vitamin D3 production. Try 20 minutes of sunshine a day around lunch, or take 1,000 IU of vitamin D3 daily if the weather's not cooperating. Find more health tips at

livestrong.com

© 2010 Rodale Inc. | MensHealth.com