

LIVESTRONG

An Interview with Lance Armstrong, LIVESTRONG



Lance Armstrong

EDITORS' NOTE Lance Armstrong is an American professional road racing cyclist who rides for UCI ProTeam Radio Shack. He is also the Founder and Chairman of the Lance Armstrong Foundation for cancer research and support. He won the Tour de France a record-breaking seven consecutive years, from 1999 to 2005. He has survived testicular cancer, a tumor that metastasized to his brain and lungs in 1996. In 1999, he was named the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) Wide World of Sports Athlete of the Year; in 2000 he won the Prince of Asturias Award for Sports; in 2002, Sports Illustrated magazine named him Sportsman of the Year, and he was also named Associated Press Male Athlete of the Year for the years 2002 to 2005. He received ESPN's ESPY Award for Best Male Athlete in 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006, and won the BBC Overseas Sports Personality of the Year award in 2003. He retired from racing in July 2005, at the end of the 2005 Tour de France, but returned to competitive cycling in January 2009, finishing third in the 2009 Tour de France.

ORGANIZATION BRIEF LIVESTRONG® (www.LIVESTRONG.org) fights for the 28 million people around the world living with cancer today, assisting those afflicted with the disease from the moment of diagnosis and giving them the resources and support they need to fight cancer head-on. They find innovative ways to raise awareness, fund research, and end the stigma

about cancer that many survivors face. They also connect people and communities to drive social change, and call for state, national, and world leaders to help fight the disease.

Would you highlight your personal story with cancer and how this experience led to the creation of LIVESTRONG?

At the age of 25, I had proven myself to be one of the world's best cyclists, by winning the World Championships, the Tour DuPont, and multiple Tour de France stages. I was racing well and excited about the future. But when they told me I had cancer, bike racing suddenly seemed insignificant.

The diagnosis was testicular cancer, the most common cancer in men age 15 to 35. If detected early, its cure rate is a promising 90 percent. Like most young, healthy men, I ignored the warning signs, and never imagined the seriousness of my condition. Going untreated, the cancer had spread to my abdomen, lungs, and brain. My chances for survival dimmed.

A combination of physical conditioning, a strong support system, and a competitive spirit took over. I declared myself not a cancer victim but a cancer survivor. I took an active role in educating myself about my disease and the treatment available to me. Armed with knowledge and confidence in medicine, I underwent aggressive treatment and beat the disease.

While I was being treated, my nurse, Latrice Haney, started introducing me to other patients, and that was when I truly began to grasp the magnitude of cancer. At the time, there were more than eight million people living with cancer. I got really angry and became interested in fighting cancer – not just my own, but cancer in general. I knew that I needed to use my experience to help others, which was how the idea for my foundation began.

How critical was it for you to educate yourself with all of the research and to develop a full understanding of cancer in order to beat the disease?

For someone diagnosed with cancer, hope is the greatest weapon to have. There can be – and should be – life after cancer for more people, and I want people to know that.

I spent countless hours reading and asking questions. It's really important to advocate for yourself and be sure that the treatment you are getting is the best treatment for you. I got a second opinion, which can be tough to do. We are

inclined to not question our doctors and to trust them implicitly. That being said, the second opinion I got was the right one for me, so I would encourage people to seek more opinions.

I also think a person with cancer needs to seek out support from friends and family. I had a group of people there to listen to me, cheer me on, and remind me I wasn't alone. I always felt that other people were invested in my survival. You can't overestimate the benefit of that kind of support and friendship.

Ask the tough questions, get a second opinion, take good care of yourself, surround yourself with family and friends, and do whatever it takes to keep hope alive. We believe that unity is strength, knowledge is power, and attitude is everything – and that is true for every person affected by cancer.

As a world-class athlete, creating a foundation was not an area where you had experience. Was it challenging to create the Lance Armstrong Foundation (LAF), especially since you did this while receiving treatment and fighting the disease?

I didn't know the first thing about starting a foundation when we came up with the idea in 1997. I just knew I wanted to help. I was sitting at a restaurant in Austin, Texas with my closest friends and we decided something had to be done, hopefully something that would affect at least one life.

It was a challenge, but this was the biggest fight of my life. So with great support from my friends and the community, the LAF was born. In the early years, we raised an average of \$7 million a year. This year, I am proud to say, our goal is to raise \$40 million. Perhaps the success of me and my teammates on the bike brought more attention to our mission, but what truly made us flourish was our ability to connect people and communities to drive social change.



LIVESTRONG has received strong support. Will you highlight the opportunities for people to get involved with the foundation?



At LIVESTRONG, we unite people to fight cancer. Anyone can join the fight and help make cancer a global priority. We offer several ways to get involved: advocacy, fundraising, volunteerism. At livestrongaction.org, you can find opportunities to take action globally, nationally, and in your own neighborhood. We provide a platform to reach out to your leaders and to friends, relatives, and colleagues who have been affected by cancer to get them involved in the fight, and alert them to ways they can fight cancer in their own lives; you can become a local LIVESTRONG leader at livestrong.org and engage friends, families, and community members in collective action to make cancer a priority. Led by cancer survivors and supporters, leaders work within their local communities to raise awareness, reduce stigma, and generate funding for the cancer fight.

I also encourage folks to follow us on Twitter and Facebook to learn what we and our advocates are doing at the local, national, and global level. Through the active participation of hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of well-organized cancer advocates, we will make cancer a global priority.

In 2004, the LIVESTRONG wristband and Wear Yellow LIVESTRONG campaign began. This campaign had a major impact across all age groups and segments of the population. Were you surprised at how much the campaign affected people, and is this an ongoing campaign?

We were all shocked by the impact of the wristband. LIVESTRONG as a concept really resonated with people and we realized we were on to something. It wasn't just about cancer, but about living life to its fullest; attacking each minute, yet being focused enough to take it all in. The brand took off and in turn brought more attention to the disease and the foundation. To think we have raised \$70 million to date by selling wristbands for \$1 each is truly amazing. This campaign continues to thrive today and will forever be a part of the LIVESTRONG movement.

In 2009, the LIVESTRONG Global Cancer Campaign was launched. What are the key aspects to this campaign, and how critical is it to have a global focus?

For more than 10 years, we partnered with other organizations and dedicated advocates to make cancer a national priority in the United States. In 2009, we decided to take the cancer fight global. By 2010, cancer is projected to become the leading cause of death worldwide.

This statistic is both shocking and needless, because cancer is one of the most preventable and curable of the major life-threatening diseases facing the world today. One-third of all cancer incidents are preventable and one-third are treatable with early detection and proper resources. To address the global cancer burden, LIVESTRONG is urging world leaders, corporations, nongovernmental organizations, and advocates to work towards ending the stigma of cancer and turning cancer victims into cancer survivors.

Millions of people around the world suffer from cancer in isolation, victims not only of the disease but of social stigma. For too many, a diagnosis of cancer can result in ostracism from colleagues, friends, and even family, and cancer becomes a shameful condition that must be hidden. This stigma leads to a lack of early detection, failure to seek treatment, and an increase in cancer mortality. Our goal is to build an international grassroots movement that will take cancer from isolation to collaboration. Research shows increased mortality is often caused by a lack of resources and knowledge related to cancer awareness, screening, prevention, treatment, and care. Only through collective action can we make cancer a global priority and reduce its burden on the world's population; to transform cancer from obscurity to priority.

Cancer kills more people than malaria, tuberculosis and AIDS combined. However, many governments devote few resources to fighting cancer and collect little information about its causes and effects. LIVESTRONG is encouraging world leaders to make significant commitments to help fight cancer, both in their countries and globally.

You have been actively involved in the foundation from its inception. Is it challenging to budget your time between the foundation and your other interests?

Of course I wanted to win an eighth Tour de France, but the most important issue is taking the global cancer epidemic to a bigger stage; that is the first priority here. While I am on the bike taking the message global, we have an army of folks in Austin making sure we don't lose ground on the domestic front. I am also the Chairman of our Board and remain actively engaged in our vision and strategy.

With the major impact LIVESTRONG has had since its beginning, do you take the time to step back and appreciate all of the critical work that the foundation has done and the many lives you have so positively affected?

I'm lucky to meet so many people through LIVESTRONG that remind me how courageous the average cancer patient is, and it's a reminder that cancer doesn't discriminate. I have met people from all over the world with all types of cancer and more brave kids than I can count. A person could get discouraged by that. At LIVESTRONG, we use it to inspire us to work harder to help survivors face the challenges and changes that come with cancer.

LIVESTRONG recently moved in to a new home in Austin, Texas. Would you provide an overview of the new facility and how it will help shape the future of the foundation?

The new building is located in East Austin,

an underserved community in the process of revitalization. The location reinforces our mission to inspire and empower people affected by cancer, an especially important commitment in communities that traditionally have not had access to health care resources.

LIVESTRONG moved to our new home in February 2009 for several reasons: most notably, our move creates a permanent home for us and creates a space for other nonprofit organizations in Austin to hold meetings; we also worked hard to ensure our new home was environmentally friendly. In fact, it was designated as one of Austin's first gold-certified Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) facilities and was given a four-star rating by the Austin Energy Green Building Program.

We are very excited about what our new home means for the future of the foundation. Not only are we providing the foundation with more stability and long-term fiscal health, but we are also bringing a first-of-its-kind patient navigation center to Central Texas in 2010. The LIVESTRONG Patient Navigation Center (PNC) will service people with cancer or at risk for cancer with an emphasis on underserved populations in the Austin area. The PNC will work to improve access to all available support systems ranging from information and education to financial assistance and family support. The PNC will not provide patient care, but will establish relationships with Austin-area physicians, hospitals, clinics, and organizations that provide cancer education, prevention, screening, treatment, and support services in order to help people navigate access to those services based on their individual needs.



You have achieved great success in your life, from being at the top of your sport for many years to your numerous achievements with LIVESTRONG. What is next for Lance Armstrong?

Next year, I am excited to be racing for a new team, Team Radio Shack. Last year was not an ideal situation with our team and the sponsorship. Now we have a great group in place and a great sponsor. Like every year, the goal for me is to win the Tour de France. Together, we will continue to spread our message globally, meeting with world leaders and securing commitments in the fight against cancer. ●

*LIVESTRONG challenge (bottom on the previous page);
Lance Armstrong meeting with a cancer survivor (top);
LIVESTRONG supporter's wristbands (bottom)*