

# What Does **49** Look Like?

DEBORAH JOHNSTON, 49

*Seven years ago, a diagnosis of cervical cancer sent this headstrong Melbourne massage therapist and consultant on a new health and wellbeing journey*

◆ **Accepting hard news** In 2005, doctors diagnosed me with cervical cancer and said I only had six months to live. I cried for days—I'd already lost my mother to breast cancer and my father to lung cancer. The specialists advised me to have chemotherapy and radiation, but that wasn't for me. So I took a huge leap of faith and tried a more natural route.

◆ **Forging a new path** Under the guidance of an amazing traditional-Chinese-medicine expert, I saturated my body with herbs. I boiled them up in my kitchen three times a day, and they tasted absolutely awful—like drinking half a litre of gritty black glue. Definitely not fun!

◆ **Finding a surgical solution** After the doctors handed down their diagnosis, I did have surgery—a partial hysterectomy. But my recovery was incredibly rapid, and I believe that was because my body was so healthy. I'd been meditating, eating organic food, having acupuncture and reflexology, and, of course, taking the Chinese herbs. To the experts' surprise, when I had my final scans, I was given the all clear. Today I'm fine, and thankfully, I've passed the five-year safety mark. Now, if I have any health problems at all—even a simple case of the sniffles or just an upset stomach—I always try a natural solution first.

◆ **Doing things my way** I know my health story is controversial—chemotherapy is a serious option for people who have cancer. But traditional Chinese medicine was the best choice for me. I knew I was taking a big chance, but it felt like the right decision. And I didn't ignore my doctors' advice to have surgery. I knew that I was a ticking time bomb, and that if I hadn't had the operation, I mightn't be here today.

◆ **Dating dilemmas** I'm very up-front with men. I don't have time to beat around the bush! I'd still love to have a relationship and marry the right guy, but I haven't yet found the strength to go through the motions of telling someone what I've been through and explaining the scar on my belly.

◆ **Hitting the half century** I'm going to celebrate turning 50! I want to do something fantastic on my birthday, like go hot-air ballooning. You can't take life for granted. You need to get out there and do what makes you happy—to do more of the things that make your heart sing. **P**



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