

Breast Cancer

Psychosocial Issues and Support Strategies

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Factors Affecting the Psychosocial Impact Breast Cancer

(1) Psychological and Psychosocial Factors

- Type and degree of disruption in life cycle tasks
(*e.g.marital, child bearing*)
- Personality and ability to cope with stress
- Prior personal association with breast cancer
- Prior psychiatric history
- Availability of psychological and social support

(continued)...

(2) Medical Factors

- Stage of cancer
- Treatment(s) received
(mastectomy/lumpectomy, radiation, adjuvant chemotherapy)
- Psychological support provided by doctors and staff

SELF

Self-concept

The way in which people perceive or react to themselves

- Personal: *facts about the self or a persons self opinion*
- Social: *perception of how one is regarded by others*
- Self-ideals: *perceptions of oneself with respect to how one would like to be*

Psychosocial Impact of Breast Cancer

- Self-concept
- Body Image
- Intimacy & Sexuality
 - patients experiencing sexual problems following diagnosis and treatment vary from 10% to 88%
- Interpersonal problems
- New relationships post diagnosis

Physical Issues

- Chemotherapy induced nausea & vomiting
 - anticipatory versus conditioned
- Pain
 - acute & chronic
- Lymphoedema
 - accumulation of lymph in soft tissue and swelling, caused by inflammation, obstruction, or removal of lymph vessels

Physical Issues (cont...)

- Female fertility/pregnancy issues
- Fatigue
- Disfigurement
 - affecting body image/sexuality
- Cognitive difficulties
 - high dose chemotherapy is more likely than low dose chemotherapy to be associated with impairments inattention, speed of information processing, and visual processing deficits

Psychological Distress

- Anxiety (15% to 23%)
 - includes panic attacks, generalised worry, and treatment phobias e.g. needle phobias
- Depression (20% - 35%)
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (3% to 12 %)

cont...

- Stress and Adjustment reactions
 - *people who perceive they have poor support are more likely to experience greater psychological distress (Soellner, Zschocke, Zingg-Schir, Stein, Rumpold, Fritsch et al, 1999; Roberts, Cox, Shannon & Wells, 1994).*
 - *Stress reactions also present in children (Welch, Wadsworth, Compas, 1996) and partners (Baider & Denour, 1999).*

Anxiety

Symptoms of anxiety include:

- racing heart
- pain, pressure, or tingling in chest
- butterflies or churning in stomach
- constipation or diarrhoea
- tight tense muscles
- lump in throat
- dry mouth
- feeling dizzy, lightheaded, “spaced out”
- choking smothering sensations
- rubbery or jelly legs
- trembling or shaking

Depression

Symptoms of depression include:

- feelings of hopelessness/helplessness
- loss of pleasure/happiness (anhedonia)
- sleep disturbance
- irritability and/or uncontrolled anger
- feeling worthless
- guilt
- feeling like you want to cry but can't

Special Issues

(1) Role and Care of the Family (potential traumatic effect on children)

(2) Sexual Functioning

1 year post-treatment: 44% not interested in having sex; 54% did not feel sexually attractive; 58% decreased frequency of sexual intercourse; 42% difficulty with becoming sexually aroused; 50% difficulty with lubrication

3 years post-treatment: 43% uncomfortable with body image changes; 47% disinterest in sex; 48% difficulty with arousal; 50% difficulty with lubrication

Ganz et al. (1993 & 1998)

Psychosocial Interventions

The aim of any psychosocial intervention is to
provide the women with the skills and
resources necessary to cope with her illness
and improve the quality of her life

The Cognitive-Behavioural Model

A. Environment

- a series of positive, neutral and negative events occur everyday

B. Thoughts

- You interpret the events with a series of thoughts that continually flow through your mind. This is called “self-talk”

C. Mood

- Your feelings are created by your thoughts. All experiences must be processed through your brain and given a conscious meaning before you experience emotional response

Approaches to Therapy

- Cognitive Therapy (e.g. cognitive restructuring, coping self-statements, problem-solving)
- Behavioural Therapy (contingency management, distraction, progressive muscle relaxation, guided imagery, autogenic training)
- Stress Inoculation Training (package of cognitive behavioural techniques designed to foster more adaptive responses to potentially stressful situations and events)
- Systematic desensitisation

Continued...

- Hypnosis (formal induction of a state characterised by sustained attention and concentration, reduced peripheral awareness, and openness to suggestion)
- Brief Crisis Counselling
- Psychoeducation
- Group Therapies

The 10 Commandments For Reducing Stress

1. Thou shalt NOT be perfect, nor even try to be
2. Thou shalt NOT be all things to all people
3. Thou shalt leave things undone that ought to be done
4. Thou shalt NOT spread thyself to thin
5. Thou shalt learn to say "NO"

The 10 Commandments For Reducing Stress

6. Thou shalt schedule time for thyself and thy supportive network
7. Thou shalt switch off and do nothing regularly
8. Thou shalt be boring, untidy, inelegant and unattractive at times
9. Thou shalt NOT even feel guilty
10. Especially, thou shalt NOT be thine worst enemy, but be thy best friend

Self-Help Tips

Take a breather

- it is important to make deliberate efforts it counteract the negative effects of the stress you are experiencing
- it helps to take a break for a while to recharge your self and regain a sense of control
- lose yourself in an enjoyable non-demanding activity (e.g., reading a book, see a movie, gardening)
- ask a family member or neighbour to look after the children , if it is hard to get time to yourself

Self-Help Tips

Avoid Additional Pressures

- Learn to say 'no' sometimes
- Looking after everybody else needs and wants and neglecting your own causes stress

Self-Help Tips

Practice Healthy Eating Habits

- Certain food can cause or increase nervous tension. Avoid excessive tea, coffee, chocolate, coca-cola and high sugar foods.
- Stick to fruit juices, dried fruits and nuts, raw vegetables or a piece of fruit instead.

Self-Help Tips

Practice Relaxation Methods

- There are numerous relaxation methods (e.g., progressive muscle relaxation, visualisation, self-hypnosis, meditation, yoga, deep breathing)
- Choose the one that **personally suits you best**
- Daily relaxation practice has been shown to significantly reduce stress, anxiety, and depression.

Managing your thinking

- Become aware of your thoughts. Keep a journal
- Identify any distortions in your thinking
- Use coping self-talk
 - I can meet this challenge.
 - I don't like relying on others, but it is necessary for me to have help at the moment. There are still things I can do myself
 - I won't get overwhelmed: I'll just take one step at a time.

When should you seek professional help?

- if you feel like you would like assistance (perhaps you want to learn self-hypnosis or other coping strategies)
- if you have few supports
- if you feel paralysed with treatment decisions
- if you fear death during surgery or are terrified by loss of control under anesthesia
- **When you have depressive symptoms that won't lift** (signs include chronic anger, difficulty coping with daily activities, loss of motivation)
- family conflict
- if you are adjusting to multiple losses and managing multiple life stresses