
Breast Cancer Survivors: A Review of Long-Term Medical Issues and Lifestyle Recommendations

Dr. Muna Alkhaifi¹

¹ *University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada*

1 Introduction

Breast cancer survivors are any person with a diagnosis of breast cancer who completed the initial treatment (i.e. surgery, chemotherapy and/or radiation therapy) and who are without evidence of disease. Long-term survival rates after a diagnosis of breast cancer are steadily rising. The 5-year survival rate is 87%. Survivors of breast cancer represent a unique and extremely complex group of patients.

2 Aim

- Participants will explore the common long-term physical side effects after the initial treatment of breast cancer.
- Participants will identify the common psychosocial issues that breast cancer survivors experience after the completion of therapy.
- Participants will learn about the current evidence on how to improve breast cancer survivors outcomes with stress on lifestyle modification.

3 Materials and Methods

Survivorship is one of the most complicated parts of having cancer. Some people continue to receive cancer treatment for a long time to reduce the risk of recurrence or to manage the cancer as a chronic disease. Some patients may have chronic difficulties associated with long term physical side effects related to initial treatment initial. These physical side effects and their treatment will be described including lymphedema, chronic breast pain, neuropathic symptoms and chronic fatigue.

Roughly one-quarter of breast cancer survivors experience psychological issues after the completion of therapy. This include anxiety, fear of recurrence, depression, post-traumatic stress syndrome. It is important to address these issues to maintain quality of life, continue screen-

ing program which is critical for survivors and to improve survival rate. Treatment include psychoeducation, cognitive behavioral therapy, antidepressant medication and physical activity. Evidence has shown that Participating in support groups can help breast cancer survivors to find hope and new ways of coping with their feelings.

Studies have shown that interventions targeting weight, diet, and physical activity can improve quality of life (QOL), and may minimize disease and treatment-related side effects. Evidence that moderate intensity exercise can improve survival and outcomes in breast cancer survivors. Physical activity can help to improve mental health conditions like anxiety or depression. Although the existing data is inconsistent as to what you should eat to improve your outcome, the general recommendation is to focus on fruits and vegetables, and avoid processed foods, red meat and fat. Further, drinking alcohol after a breast cancer diagnosis has been associated with increased risk of breast cancer recurrence.

4 Conclusions

Physicians including primary care providers and oncologists need to be aware of Physical and psychosocial issues related to breast cancer survivorship care. This will help establish a smooth transition from a patient with breast cancer to a survivor of breast cancer while providing ongoing and future guidance. Further, this will enable patients to advocate for their own care and improve their awareness about long term issues after the treatment period.

5 Keywords

Breast Cancer, Survivorship care, Psychosocial issues, long term side effects

Author biography



Dr. Muna Alkhaifi Dr. Muna Al-khaifi is a family physician, passionate about delivering high-quality primary care, with a particular focus on women's health and particularly disease of the breast. She did her residency program in Family Medicine and a fellowship in Women's Health at the University of Toronto. She is a Staff Physician at Women's Health in Women's Hand Community Health Centre and the Breast Centre at St. Michael's Hospital (SMH) in Toronto, Canada. She is also completing a Masters of Public Health through the Dalla Lana School of Public Health. Further, she has expertise in breast disease, sexual health, HIV, and reproductive care; supporting

patients through abortion, menopause, LGBTQ care and more. Strong teaching and mentorship experience, with a passion for sharing my knowledge to help others perform at their highest level. Her research interest is in the area of Breast cancer. She is also highly involved in breast cancer patient education. She has a website that focuses on Breast Cancer survivor Care with a series of videos that incorporate patient's stories.