



Dialogue

For People Who ENJOY Learning About Themselves!

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Therapy can help improve a person's overall health status. Research shows that 20 to 60 percent of breast cancer patients experience symptoms of depression. (APA, Breast Cancer: How Your Mind Can Help Your Body, 1998) Research also shows that 50 percent of patients noticeably improved after eight therapy sessions while 75 percent of individuals

in psychotherapy improved by the end of six months. Research increasingly supports the idea that emotional and physical health are very closely linked. Psychotherapy can have a positive effect on the body's immune system. Psychotherapy has been found to increase survival time for heart surgery and cancer patients.

Coping with Chronic Pain

Chronic pain is physically and psychologically stressful and its constant discomfort can lead to anger and frustration with yourself and your loved ones. By definition, chronic pain is pain that lasts longer than six months and affects how a person lives their daily life. While physicians can provide treatment for the physical dimensions of chronic pain, psychologists are uniquely trained to help you manage the mental and emotional aspects of this often debilitating condition.

The American Psychological Association offers the following tips on coping with chronic pain:

Manage your stress. Eating well, getting plenty of sleep, and engaging in approved physical activity are all positive ways for you to handle your stress and pain.

Talk to yourself constructively. Positive thinking is a powerful tool. Focus on the improvements you are making, i.e. the pain is less today than yesterday or you feel

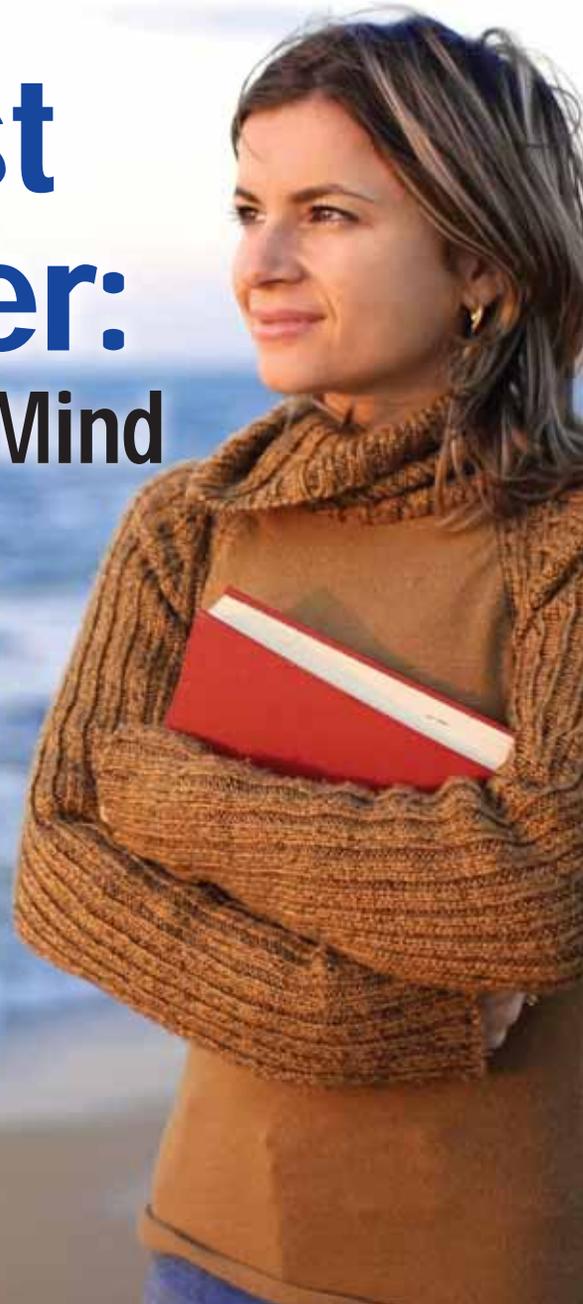
better than you did a week ago, can make a difference in your perceived comfort level.

Become active and engaged. Distracting yourself from your pain by engaging in activities you enjoy will help you highlight the positive aspects of your life.

Find support. Reach out to other people who are in your same position and who can share and understand your highs and lows.

Consult a professional. If you continue to feel overwhelmed by chronic pain at a level that keeps you from performing your daily routine, you may want to talk with a mental health professional, such as a psychologist, who can help you handle the physical and psychological repercussions of your condition.

Breast Cancer: How Your Mind Can Help Your Body



Each year 185,000 women in this country learn that they have breast cancer. Because less than a quarter of them have genetic or other known risk factors, the diagnosis often comes as a devastating surprise.

What impact does a breast cancer diagnosis have on psychological well-being?

Receiving a diagnosis of breast cancer can be one of the most distressing events women ever experience.

Distress typically continues even after the initial shock of diagnosis has passed. As women begin what is often a lengthy treatment process, they may find themselves faced with new problems. They may find their personal relationships in turmoil, for instance. They may feel tired all the time. They may be very worried about their symptoms, treatment and mortality. They may face discrimination from employers or insurance companies. Factors like these can contribute to chronic stress, anxiety and depression.

Why is it important to seek psychological help?

Feeling overwhelmed is a perfectly normal response to a breast cancer diagnosis. But negative emotions can cause women to stop doing things that are good for them and start doing things that are bad for anyone but especially worrisome for those with a serious disease. Eating poorly, cutting back on exercise, having trouble sleeping, and withdrawing from family and friends, using alcohol, cigarettes, caffeine or other drugs in an attempt to soothe themselves are all consequences of trying to cope with disease.

A breast cancer diagnosis can also lead to more severe problems. Researchers estimate that anywhere from 20 to 60 percent of cancer patients experience depressive symptoms, which can make it more difficult for women to adjust and participate optimally in treatment activities. Studies show that missing as few as 15 percent of chemotherapy appointments results in significantly poorer outcomes.

How can psychological treatment help women adjust?

Licensed psychologists and other mental health professionals with experience in breast cancer treatment can help a great deal. Their primary goal is to help women learn how to cope with the physical, emotional and lifestyle changes associated with cancer as well as with medical treatments that can be painful and traumatic. For some women, the focus may be on how to explain their illness to their children or how to deal with a partner's response. For others, it may be on how to choose the right hospital or medical treatment. For still others, it may be on how to control stress, anxiety or depression. By teaching patients problem-solving strategies in a supportive environment, psychologists help women work through their grief, fear, and other emotions. For many women, this life-threatening crisis eventually proves to be an opportunity for life-enhancing personal growth.

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Mind/Body Health: Heart Disease



You might think heart disease is linked only with physical activities—a lack of exercise, poor diet, smoking, and excessive drinking. While these habits do heighten the risk of high blood pressure, heart attacks, strokes, and other cardiovascular problems, your thoughts, attitudes, and emotions are just as important. They can not only accelerate the onset of heart disease, but also get in the way of taking positive steps to improve your health or that of a loved one.

Practicing prevention

A healthy lifestyle can go a long way toward reducing the risk of heart disease or managing a diagnosed condition, even if you face a higher risk due to uncontrollable factors such as age, sex, or family history.

It takes personal discipline to ingrain new habits into your lifestyle.

Coping with life's pressures

Heart disease has many other mind-body connections that you should consider. Prolonged stress due to the pressures at home, on the job, or from other sources

can contribute to abnormally high blood pressure and circulation problems.

How you handle stress also influences how your cardiovascular system responds. Studies have shown that if stress makes you angry or irritable, you're more likely to have heart disease or a heart attack. In fact, the way you respond to stress may be a greater risk factor for heart problems than smoking, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol.

A downward spiral

Then there's depression, the persistent feeling of sadness and despair that can isolate you from the rest of the world. In its severest form, clinical depression, this condition can not only increase the risk of heart disease but also worsen an existing condition.

Research shows that while approximately 20 percent of us experience an episode of depression in our lifetimes, the figure climbs to 50 percent among people with heart disease. Long-term studies reveal that men and women diagnosed with

clinical depression are more than twice as likely to develop coronary artery disease or suffer a heart attack. In addition, heart patients are three times as likely to be depressed at any given time than the population as a whole.

The struggle to rebound

Depression can also complicate the aftermath of a heart attack, stroke, or invasive procedure such as open-heart surgery. According to the National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH), up to 65 percent of coronary heart disease patients with a history of heart attack experience various forms of depression. Major depression can complicate the recovery process and actually worsen your condition. Prolonged depression in patients with cardiovascular disease has been shown to contribute to subsequent heart attacks and strokes.

What you can do

Although heart disease is a serious condition that requires constant monitoring, there are many things you can do to reduce your risk for cardiovascular problems and live a full, active life, even if you should suffer a heart attack.

- Talk to your doctor.
- Avoid trying to fix every problem at once, if possible. Focus instead on changing one existing habit (e.g., eating habits, inactive lifestyle). Set a reasonable initial goal and work toward meeting it.
- Don't ignore the symptoms of depression. Feelings of sadness or emptiness, loss of interest in ordinary or pleasurable activities, reduced energy, and eating and sleep disorders are just a few of depression's many warning signs.
- Identify the sources of stress in your life and look for ways to reduce and manage them. See a professional like a psychologist to learn to manage stress.
- Enlist the support of friends, family, and work associates.
- If you feel overwhelmed by the challenge of managing the behaviors associated with heart disease, consult a qualified psychologist.

■ Breast Cancer

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Breast cancer patients themselves aren't the only ones who can benefit from psychological treatment. Psychologists often help spouses who must offer both emotional and practical support while dealing with their own feelings, for instance. Children, parents and friends involved in caretaking can also benefit from psychological interventions.

Psychologists can help women learn to cope with such issues as fears about recurrence and impatience with life's more mundane problems.

Can psychological treatment help the body, too?

Absolutely. Take the nausea and vomiting that often accompany chemotherapy, for example. For some women, these side effects can be severe enough to make them reject further treatment efforts. Psychologists can teach women relaxation exercises, meditation, self-hypnosis, imagery or other skills that can effectively relieve nausea without the side effects of pharmaceutical approaches.

Psychological treatment has indirect effects on physical health as well. Researchers already know that stress suppresses

the body's ability to protect itself. What they now suspect is that the coping skills that psychologists teach may actually boost the immune system's strength. In one well-known study, for example, patients with advanced breast cancer who underwent group therapy lived longer than those who did not.

What type of psychological treatment is helpful?

Individual sessions with a licensed psychologist typically emphasize the understanding and modification of patterns of thinking and behavior. Psychological interventions strive to help women adjust to their diagnoses, cope with treatment and come to terms with the disease's impact on their lives. These interventions offer psychologists an opportunity to help women better understand breast cancer and its treatment. Psychologists typically ask women open-ended questions about their assumptions, ideas for living life more fully and other matters. Although negative thoughts and feelings are addressed, most psychological interventions focus on problem solving as women meet each new challenge.

A breast cancer diagnosis can severely impair a woman's psychological functioning, which in turn can jeopardize her physical health. But it doesn't have to be that way. Women who seek help from licensed psychologists with experience in breast cancer treatment can actually use the mind-body connection to their advantage to enhance both mental and physical health.

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