

# Wellness Coaching

## An intervention to increase healthy behavior in breast cancer survivors

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**BACKGROUND:** Regular physical activity after breast cancer diagnosis improves survival rates and quality of life (QOL). However, breast cancer survivors rarely meet guidelines for recommended levels of physical activity. Wellness coaching interventions (WCIs) have improved exercise and health behaviors in other patient populations.

**OBJECTIVES:** This study assessed the feasibility and effectiveness of WCIs for increasing physical activity in breast cancer survivors; secondary measures included changes in dietary habits, weight, and QOL.

**METHODS:** 20 obese or overweight breast cancer survivors who recently completed active breast cancer treatment were recruited into a single-arm, 12-week WCI pilot feasibility study. The intervention was comprised of one in-person wellness coaching visit followed by four telephone calls over 12 weeks and 12 weekly emails containing wellness recommendations.

**FINDINGS:** Significant improvements from pre- to postintervention were seen in physical activity level, dietary habits, and in some aspects of QOL. Forty percent of participants achieved the 3% postintervention weight-loss goal, but this was not sustained at 30 weeks.

### KEYWORDS

breast cancer; life and wellness coaching; obesity; physical activity; survivorship

### DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

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**THERE ARE CURRENTLY MORE THAN THREE MILLION** breast cancer survivors in the United States, and their numbers are expected to increase by another million by 2030 (Miller et al., 2019). Healthy lifestyle habits, particularly regular physical activity, have been shown to be positively correlated with breast cancer survival (Holick et al., 2008; Holmes et al., 2005). Guidelines recommend that cancer survivors engage in at least 150–300 minutes of moderate activity weekly and include at least two days per week of strengthening exercises (Campbell et al., 2019; National Comprehensive Cancer Network, 2019; Rock et al., 2012). Other factors associated with positive breast cancer outcomes include a low-fat diet (Chlebowski et al., 2006), a diet rich in fruits and vegetables (Pierce et al., 2007), and having a positive quality of life (QOL) (Epplein et al., 2011). In addition, overweight women and those who gain weight after cancer diagnosis (50%–96% of patients) (Vance et al., 2011) have a higher rate of recurrence and mortality from breast cancer (Chan et al., 2014; Chlebowski et al., 2002; Playdon et al., 2015; Vance et al., 2011). These outcomes may be related to the negative microenvironment associated with excess adiposity, such as increased proinflammatory markers, increased estrogen secretion, and hyperinsulinemia, or underdosing of chemotherapy and radiation therapy in obese patients (Picon-Ruiz et al., 2017). Evidence suggests that approximately one-third of women receiving chemotherapy gain weight, and one-third gain weight during the five years of endocrine therapy (Gandhi et al., 2019; Raghavendra et al., 2018). Given the prevalence of weight gain, being overweight, and obesity in this population, effective strategies are needed to help women understand the implications of body weight for their breast cancer prognosis and to help them achieve an ideal body weight.

The development of new models of cancer survivorship care is a priority in oncology (Halpern et al., 2016); wellness interventions are at the core of these models (Rowland, 2008). Clinicians have limited time to address wellness issues; therefore, collaboration with nurse coaches specifically trained to educate and motivate patients on wellness behaviors may help to bridge this gap. Nurses are considered the most trusted role in health care, and nurse coaching is a natural role extension for nurses (American Hospital Association, 2019). Coaching patients is a core competency in patient care and a foundation of nursing practice, but the role of the nurse coach, specifically, is new (Ross et al., 2018). Nurse coaching has been acknowledged by the American Nurses Association since 2012 (Hess et al., 2013).

Health and wellness coaches facilitate and empower patients to develop and achieve self-determined wellness goals and assist patients to use their