

Women fight the effects of chemotherapy long after treatment ends

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For some women, the effects of breast cancer, the most common cancer affecting women, do not end when they leave the hospital. Now, researchers in the University of Missouri School of Health Professions have studied the lives of breast cancer patients following chemotherapy and found that their environments and available support systems help determine the quality of their lives.

"A lot of times people get mentally and emotionally ready to deal with chemotherapy and they receive a lot of support during that time," said Stephanie Reid-Arndt, an assistant professor of health psychology in the School of Health Professions. "Then they go home and everyone feels like it's over, but the patients still have worries and fears about the changes they've been through and what it means for the future."

The study found that people reluctant to seek out social support, including therapy and informal support networks, following chemotherapy reported a lower quality of life and higher incidences of depression. A lot of people have trouble reaching out to a support network, don't know how, don't want to bother people or simply don't want to share their problems, Reid-Arndt said.

The patients' homes also were found to be a factor as the study reported a lower quality of life and functional well-being for women returning to rural areas after chemotherapy. Women in rural areas also reported increased [breast cancer](#) related symptoms such as body-image issues and fatigue.

It isn't all bad news for patients from rural communities though. People in rural communities value close relationships with family, the community and religious organizations and find solace in these support systems after [chemotherapy](#), according to research on this topic.

"There tends to be strong community support for patients in rural areas that will accommodate varying levels of function," Reid-Arndt said.

"Unfortunately, while this informal support system provides great comfort to patients, it lacks formal mental health and health issues knowledge available from health care professionals."

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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