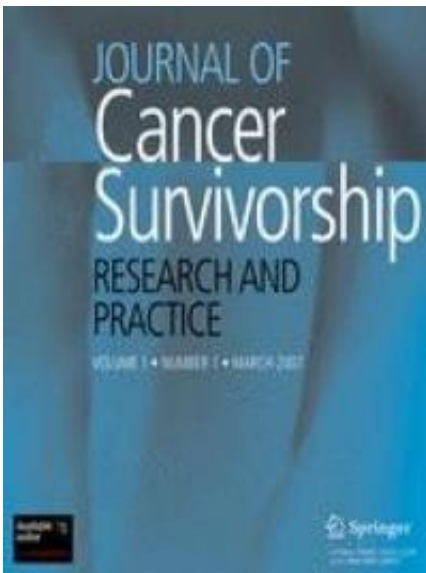


Breastfeeding -- added protection for cancer survivors?

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This is the cover of the *Journal of Cancer Survivorship*. Credit: Springer / Heidelberg

Women who have survived childhood cancer should be advised to breastfeed if they can, in order to offset some of the negative health effects of their earlier cancer treatment. According to Susan Ogg and colleagues from St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee, making women aware of the benefits of breastfeeding should be part of routine post-cancer diet and healthy lifestyle recommendations. Their work is published online in Springer's *Journal of Cancer Survivorship*.

It is estimated that one in every 640 young adults between the ages of 20 and 39 will be a survivor of childhood cancer, largely due to the progress in [cancer therapy](#). Specifically, 80 percent of children and adolescents treated with modern cancer therapies now survive. This growing number of cancer survivors faces significant health challenges, including a variety of adverse effects of the cancer itself and its treatment. These late effects include impaired growth and development, organ dysfunction, reproductive difficulties as well as increased risk of cancer re-occurrence.

It is well established that breastfeeding confers a number of health benefits to both infants and their mothers. Ogg and team looked at whether breastfeeding might result in the same benefits to women who have survived childhood cancer.

They reviewed existing research looking at whether women can successfully breastfeed after cancer treatment in childhood, the long-term effects of early cancer treatment on women's health in general and how breastfeeding may help to reduce both the risk and impact of cancer-related toxicity in those who survive.

They found that breastfeeding had the potential to influence positively bone mineral density, [metabolic syndrome](#) risk factors, cardiovascular disease and secondary tumors - conditions negatively affected by childhood cancer.

Ogg and colleagues conclude: "Alongside advice to eat plenty of fruit and vegetables, abstain from smoking, use suitable sun protection, practice safe sex and take part in regular physical activity, women who have survived [childhood cancer](#) and are physically able to breastfeed, should be actively encouraged to do so to help protect them against the many lasting effects of [cancer treatment](#)."

More information: Ogg SW et al (2011). Protective effects of breastfeeding for mothers surviving childhood cancer. *Journal of Cancer Survivorship*. [DOI:10.1007/s11764-010-0169-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11764-010-0169-z)

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