

Depression and pain increase fatigue in breast cancer survivors

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Understanding fatigue-related factors following breast cancer treatment helps in survival recovery. Credit: SINC. OC.

In Spain, 5-year survival following breast cancer diagnosis is more than 83%. Around 66% suffer fatigue following treatment. A Spanish research establishes the factors associated with tiredness in cancer survivors to improve their quality of life and rehabilitation.

"Cancer-related fatigue is the symptom that most limits quality of life and is most common in patients that survive cancerous processes," explained Manuel Arroyo, researcher from the University of Granada and lead author of a study that links [psychological disorders](#) and physical pain episodes with fatigue after treating a breast tumour.

More than 66% of [breast cancer survivors](#) suffer tiredness following

recovery, caused directly by the disease, physical deterioration or the treatment received. Therefore, understanding the factors related with fatigue and how they can be alleviated optimises survivors' recovery.

Fifty-nine [female patients](#) treated for [breast cancer](#) were followed-up one year after having clinically overcome the disease. The researchers assessed their psychological and physical condition as well as different aspects linked to the typical medical symptoms following a cancerous process (tiredness, pain, limited movement, depression, etc.).

A statistical procedure (resampling) allowed inferences to be made similar to those that would be obtained from larger samples. "This method means that the data were more reliable and eliminated the problem of having a reduced sample size," explained Arroyo. "It is difficult to find volunteers because patients are not often very willing to participate in research after having been through such harsh treatment."

The results show that the patients most affected by tiredness following treatment also suffer episodes of depression and body image deterioration, neck and shoulder pain, and limited [arm movement](#), possibly due to the [surgical intervention](#).

Effects of survival

Following [breast cancer treatment](#), patients present with physical and psychological symptoms that influence their health.

Previous studies have already observed self-esteem- and body image-related disorders following the cancerous process. But for the first time, a team of researchers has associated sensory hypersensitivity, limited movement and certain psychological conditions with fatigue observed following cancer treatment.

"These findings should motivate patient support programmes which improve their psychological condition and offer resources that can reduce pain," pointed out Arroyo, who further stressed that "if fatigue is not treated, patients can suffer it for years, having a serious physical, emotional, social and economic impact."

More information: Cantarero Villanueva, Antarero Villanueva, C-Fernández Lao, C. Fernández de las Peñas, L. Díaz Rodríguez, E. Sánchez Cantalejo, M. Arroyo Morales. "Associations among musculoskeletal impairments, depression, body image and fatigue in breast cancer survivors within the first year after treatment". *European Journal of Cancer Care* 20 (2011): 632-636, 11th Septiembre 2011.

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