

Many breast cancer survivors worry about cancer returning

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"Cancer worry" is the fear that cancer will return, said researchers at Moffitt Cancer Center who studied cancer worry among breast cancer survivors and published their findings in *Psycho-Oncology*. They found that even three years after successful treatment, two-thirds of the 202 breast cancer survivors who participated in their study said they had "a moderate level of worry."

"Little is known about the factors associated with cancer worry," said paper lead author Paul B. Jacobsen, Ph.D., associate center director for Moffitt's Center for Population Sciences. "In order to evaluate those factors, this study examined associations between breast cancer worry and demographic factors, such as age, and clinical factors, such as having had [chemotherapy](#), fatigue, greater symptom burden and greater perceived [risk perception](#) of [recurrence](#)."

Jacobsen and his colleagues at Moffitt, the University of South Florida and the University of Kentucky found that three years after treatment, those [breast cancer survivors](#) who reported experiencing fatigue and other symptoms may also report greater cancer worry than those who reported fewer symptoms.

"Understanding the characteristics associated with cancer worry can help identify those who are likely to experience such fears," Jacobsen explained. "Understanding those factors is important because worry can be linked to health behaviors."

The researchers suggested that some cancer worry may lead to healthy behaviors, while too much or too little worry may lead to unhealthy behaviors; yet more work is needed to understand how worry might be related to a variety of cancer risk reduction behaviors among cancer survivors.

"Of particular interest were the significant effects of risk perception," Jacobsen added. "It is logical that those who perceive themselves to be a greater risk for recurrence - which may not correspond to actual risk - worry more."

The researchers concluded, as they had hypothesized, that fatigue, symptom burden and risk perception are associated with cancer worry among breast [cancer survivors](#), but also suggested that lingering fatigue and other symptoms may remind [breast cancer](#) survivors of their disease and, in turn, raise cancer worry.

Provided by H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute

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