

Functional disability high among newly diagnosed older breast cancer patients

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Many older women with newly diagnosed breast cancer have difficulty accomplishing daily tasks, and African-Americans seem to be disproportionately affected. Those are the findings of a new study published early online in *Cancer*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society. The study's results suggest that many breast cancer patients could benefit from receiving therapy to improve their physical function.

Many studies conducted in older adults have demonstrated that, compared with Caucasians, African-Americans are more likely to experience functional disability, or the need for assistance with activities of daily living such as bathing, dressing, toileting, feeding, shopping, preparing meals, using the telephone, housekeeping, and managing medications and finances. However, none of these studies have been conducted in older cancer patients or in [cancer survivors](#).

Cynthia Owusu, MD, MS, of the Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine and University Hospitals Case Medical Center in Cleveland, and her colleagues looked to see if there are racial differences in functional disability among older women with newly diagnosed breast cancer. The researchers enrolled 190 women aged 65 years or older at the time of diagnosis, and they found that 39 percent of them experienced functional disability. African-American women were four times as likely to have functional disability compared with Non-Hispanic White women. This racial difference in functional status disappeared when the researchers took into account African-American

participants' lower household income and educational status and their higher prevalence of [chronic medical conditions](#).

"These findings have implications for cancer treatment decision-making since optimum functional status is a key factor considered in treatment selection. At-risk groups for [functional disability](#), such as older African-Americans, may be less likely to tolerate standard treatment and therefore interventions ought to be developed to improve their physical function," said Dr. Owusu. "Moreover, such individuals may be more likely to experience persistent functional decline after treatment, further worsening their survival outcomes," she added.

More information: "Racial disparities in functional disability among older women with newly diagnosed non-metastatic breast cancer." Cynthia Owusu, Mark Schluchter, Siran M. Koroukian, Suzanne Mazhuvanchery, and Nathan A. Berger. *Cancer*; Published Online: September 23, 2013. [DOI: 10.1002/cncr.28232](#)

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