

Social interaction can affect breast cancer outcomes

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New research suggests that women with stronger social connections

while being treated for breast cancer may fare better than those who don't have that kind of support.

Nichole Cook, a breast imaging nurse coordinator at Penn State Breast Center, said that doesn't necessarily mean someone without a strong social support system should expect the worst. Rather, it simply highlights the importance of creating a network if none exists.

"While most [women](#) do have support, we see many who don't have anyone to take them to and from appointments or sit next to them as they receive [test results](#)," she said.

She encourages these patients to seek out a support group, such as the one offered at the Breast Center at 6 p.m. on the second Monday of each month.

"From diagnosis through treatment, there is such a wide range of emotions that women go through, and that can be tough on those who feel socially isolated," she said. "A support group is a great way to connect with others who are going through the same thing. They can talk, complain, share their experiences, and provide information and a hug."

Members of such groups trade tips on everything from handling side effects of treatment to things they have discovered to improve their mood.

"I think just having that circle of people who understand and are dealing with the same issues is beneficial," Cook said.

Aside from a support group, social connections can range from a significant other, friend or family member who cares to a church community that helps with the mundane tasks of daily life that can prove

taxing while going through treatment.

"When you're feeling lousy, you don't want to worry about how you're going to make lunch for yourself or take out the dog," said Lynn Fantom, a clinical nurse coordinator at the Breast Center.

She said one of the most difficult things for some women is to ask for help when they need it: "Caregivers sometimes feel helpless and don't know what to do. Give them things to do. It doesn't make you any less of a woman because you can't do it all yourself."

Even a pet can help by decreasing blood pressure and giving the patient someone to care for.

Fantom said patients who have a lot of faith, spirituality and a belief that they will get through their cancer journey tend to have less stress.

Cook said it's important for women to surround themselves with positive and uplifting people.

"I think your attitude definitely has an impact on your healing," she said. "So if you don't have that positivity surrounding you, that has to affect your well-being, which is going to affect your outcome."

When live support is lacking, Cook and Fantom refer patients to both community and online resources. Journaling is another good way to express feelings that have been bottled up inside.

"When they feel supported, they can face any challenge that comes forth," Fantom said.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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