

Mindfulness may be a balm for breast cancer patients

November 14 2019



(HealthDay)—Women with advanced breast cancer might find

mindfulness can ease their pain, anxiety and depression, a new study suggests.

Mindfulness is the ability to keep your mind focused on the present moment.

"Mindfulness helps us relate to our thoughts, emotions and [physical symptoms](#) in a different way," said study author Lauren Zimmaro, a postdoctoral fellow at Fox Chase Cancer Center in Philadelphia.

"Not judging or reacting to symptoms may be helpful to the physical body by lowering the fight-or-flight stress response and inducing a relaxation response," Zimmaro said in a Fox Chase news release. "Over time, people who are more mindful can buffer their stresses, and that may have a more beneficial impact on the body."

This study included 64 women with metastatic breast cancer who completed questionnaires to assess their cancer symptoms and five aspects of [mindfulness](#): observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judging and nonreactivity.

Overall, higher levels of mindfulness were associated with less pain, fatigue, anxiety, depression and sleep disturbance, according to the study published Nov. 8 in the journal *Psycho-Oncology*.

However, certain aspects of mindfulness—nonreactivity, non-judging and describing—were more strongly associated with these benefits, while observing had the weakest association. Nonreactivity was defined by Zimmaro as "being able to allow any thoughts, feelings or sensations to come and go without being carried away by them."

The finding that nonreactivity was most strongly associated with lower [symptom](#) levels suggests it may be a particularly important aspect of

mindfulness.

"Mindfulness is a good resource for dealing with the physical and psychological symptoms of metastatic disease," Zimmaro said. "Women who were more mindful tended to have lower symptoms of [metastatic breast cancer](#), including pain severity and interference, fatigue, psychological distress, and sleep disturbance."

More information: The U.S. National Institutes of Health has more on [mindfulness](#).

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Citation: Mindfulness may be a balm for breast cancer patients (2019, November 14) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-11-mindfulness-balm-breast-cancer-patients.html>

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