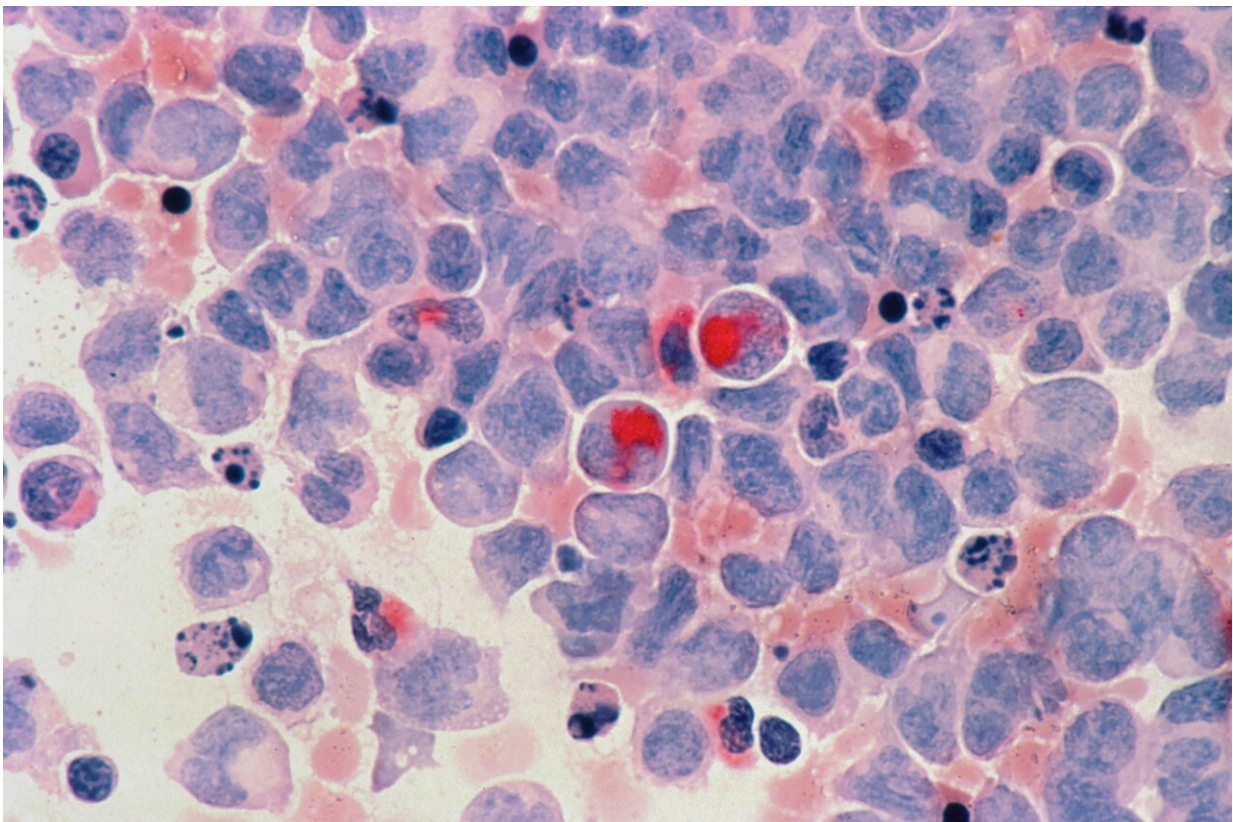


# Study explores how relationship with partner impacts breast cancer survivor's emotional and physical well-being

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Diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer place significant stress on survivors, their partners, and their relationships. A new study from

researchers with Regenstrief Institute and Indiana University's Schools of Nursing, Science, and Medicine is one of the first to examine the impact of relationship satisfaction and agreement between breast cancer survivors and their partners on the survivor's emotional and physical health.

The study found that satisfaction with the [relationship](#) by both the breast cancer survivor and their partner and agreement between the two were related to survivors' better physical functioning, such as carrying groceries or walking around the block, reduced survivor depression and fatigue.

Conversely, less satisfaction with the relationship on the part of the breast cancer survivor and lack of agreement with their partner were both significantly associated with a number of poor emotional and poor physical outcomes for the breast cancer survivor, including depression and fatigue.

"How the breast cancer survivor and partner communicated and handled stressful events, particularly those related to breast cancer, were linked to emotional and [physical health](#) for the survivor, with better agreement related to better outcomes," said study corresponding author Eric Vachon, Ph.D., R.N., a research scientist with Regenstrief Institute and IU School of Nursing.

"Interestingly, [breast cancer survivors](#) who rated their relationship satisfaction as high did not necessarily have better agreement with their partner or better well-being than those survivors who viewed their relationship less positively. It's the communication and relationship between the survivor and partner that are determinant.

"The implication of this work for breast cancer survivors, their [partners](#), clinicians, researchers, and others involved with [cancer care](#) is that it can

be extremely impactful to make sure that both the survivor and the partner are on the same page and are in agreement."

A total of 387 women (220 breast cancer survivors on average six years out from time of diagnosis and 167 controls without previous cancer diagnosis) and 387 partners (all male, although both male and female partners were eligible to participate in the study) completed questionnaires on their relationship. The average age of study participants was mid-40s.

"We knew from the literature that breast cancer survivors' rating of their relationship satisfaction is linked with some poor physical and emotional outcomes," said Dr. Vachon. "We took that knowledge to the next level and combined the breast cancer survivors' and partners' views of relationship satisfaction and relationship agreement and determined impact on survivors' health."

Among the study findings:

- breast cancer survivors' satisfaction with the relationship with their partner was significantly associated with physical functioning, attention function and sleep quality.
- not all breast cancer survivors or controls who indicated high relationship satisfaction were in agreement with their partners.
- agreement with the partner was not associated with worse physical functioning, worse attention function, or poorer sleep quality.
- after the perspective of the partner was factored in, there was less agreement on the quality and [satisfaction](#) of their relationship for survivors than for control pairs.

"This work points to the critical importance of both members of the couple focusing on strengthening the relationship. Difficulties among

couples can have devastating effects for your physical and [emotional health](#). For clinicians, making sure that based upon the preferences of the breast cancer survivor, partners are involved in discussions, treatment, and overall care is vital to the short-term and long-term health of patients," the study concludes.

The study is [published](#) in the journal *Healthcare*.

**More information:** Eric A. Vachon et al, The Association between Relationship Satisfaction Concordance and Breast Cancer Survivors' Physical and Psychosocial Well-Being, *Healthcare* (2024). [DOI: 10.3390/healthcare12020134](#)

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