

Optimizing Breast Cancer Survivorship with Lifestyle Medicine



Cancer survivorship begins at the time of diagnosis and continues throughout life. These guidelines are meant to supplement (never replace) your current care plan, which differs according to how long ago you were diagnosed, but may include surgery, chemotherapy, immunotherapy, radiation therapy, and/or anti-hormonal therapy, as well as periodic imaging and bloodwork. Follow these guidelines to reduce your risk of breast cancer recurrence and improve overall health and wellness.

Plant-predominant nutrition

Enjoy a whole-food, plant-based diet consisting of a variety of vegetables, fruits, beans, legumes, whole grains, and limited nuts and seeds. These foods are rich in fiber, phytochemicals, vitamins and minerals that have anti-inflammatory and anti-oxidant activity. Minimize excess sugars, fried foods, and processed foods.

Build your plates as follows: 50% fruits and vegetables, 25% whole grains, 25% plant-based protein like beans/legumes/soy.

Soy intake is encouraged to both prevent breast cancer as well as breast cancer recurrence, regardless of age, menopausal status, BRCA gene mutation status, and/or receptor status. This is a surprise to many, and we encourage you to learn more from a reputable source like aicr.org or nutritionfacts.org.

A whole-food, plant-based diet along with appropriate sun exposure can provide adequate calcium and vitamin D, however you may have increased needs depending upon your individual levels and bone density. Your doctor will guide you in terms of any needed supplementation.

If you are over age 50, on a predominantly plant-based diet, or have had bariatric surgery, vitamin B12 supplementation is recommended in chewable, sublingual, or liquid form. Dosages are dependent upon your individual absorption and level;

however most people require at least 50 mcg (μg) of cyanocobalamin daily, or a single weekly dose of 2000 mcg (μg) cyanocobalamin. Those over age 65 may have increased daily needs approximating 1000 mcg (μg) cyanocobalamin.

Additional supplementation should be discussed with your doctor, but it is recommended to obtain nutrients from food sources rather than dietary supplements.

Physical activity

Each week obtain 150-300 total minutes of moderate intensity physical activity, or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity physical activity, including 2-3 sessions of strength training focused on major muscle groups, as well as flexibility exercises. This could consist of brisk walking, cycling, running, using a cardio machine, or rowing, coupled with strength training utilizing body weight, weights, bands, or resistance machines. Avoid prolonged sedentary behavior like sitting for more than an hour. Aside from physical functioning and bone health, physical activity can also improve anxiety, depression, fatigue, and quality of life.

Maintain a healthy body weight

Overweight and obesity are associated with increased risk of postmenopausal breast cancer, and increased risk of recurrence and death in breast cancer patients. Use an online calculator to find your body mass index (BMI), and aim to keep your BMI < 25 kg/m².



Mindfulness and stress reduction

A mindfulness practice helps create awareness of the space between the stimulus and the response in any given situation, encouraging emotional resilience. Develop a daily practice at a consistent time, to include yoga, meditation, breathing exercises, playing an instrument, dance, creating art, a spiritual/religious practice, time in nature, and/or gratitude journaling.

Sleep quality

Use the bedroom for sleep and sex only. Maintain a consistent sleep and wake time. Aim for 7-8 hours of sleep each night. Increase daytime exposure to sunlight and daytime physical activity. Consume most of your carbohydrates earlier in the day. Eat a lower carbohydrate, lower sodium dinner, and eliminate after dinner snacking. Avoid caffeine at least 4 hours before bed, and optimally consume no afternoon caffeine. Avoid alcohol and moderate to strenuous activity within 3 hours of bed. Exposure to light at night (including the light from screens) decreases melatonin levels and therefore delays sleep onset, so avoid electronics and dim the lights at least 1 hour before bedtime. Develop a bedtime routine that begins approximately 1 hour before, including relaxing activities like bathing, herbal tea, gentle yoga, meditation, breathing exercises, etc. Keep the bedroom around 67 degrees Fahrenheit and consider a weighted blanket. If a nap is necessary, take only 1 afternoon nap under 30 minutes.

Healthy relationships

Surround yourself with supportive people. Social connection is an important predictor of happiness and longevity.

Minimize alcohol intake

Regarding breast cancer, no amount of alcohol is safe. Women should consume no more than one drink per day, and men no more than two drinks per day. It is best to abstain.

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Cancer survivorship begins at the time of diagnosis and continues throughout life. Follow these guidelines to reduce your risk of breast cancer recurrence and improve overall health and wellness.

- Enjoy a whole-food, **plant based diet**, including **soy** such as tofu, tempeh, and soy milk to help prevent breast cancer recurrence.
- Appropriate **sun exposure** can provide adequate vitamin D, but talk to your doctor about the need for additional supplementation.
- If you are on a predominantly plant based diet, utilize a **B12 supplement**.
- Avoid prolonged sedentary behavior like sitting for more than an hour. Try to regularly **stay active**.
- Practice mindfulness and **stress reduction**. Spend time outside, try yoga or meditation, create art, or start a gratitude journal.
- Maintain **sleep quality** with a calming bedtime ritual and a consistent sleep and wake time.

AMERICAN COLLEGE OF Lifestyle Medicine

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