

# Exercise and Wellness Programs Enhance Breast Cancer Patients' Well-Being and Can Lower Healthcare Costs

*New Studies Show Significant Impact of Prehabilitation and Post-Surgical Programs*

BOSTON, MA, USA, April 28, 2023

/EINPresswire.com/ -- Specialized

exercise and wellness programs

significantly elevated breast cancer

patients' physical well-being and quality-of-life while reducing healthcare costs in new research presented this week at the American Society of Breast Surgeons Annual Meeting in Boston.



The American Society of Breast Surgeons is the leading medical society focusing exclusively on the surgical treatment of breast disease.

Karen Wonders, PhD, FACSM, lead study author and Professor of Exercise Physiology, Program



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*Karen Wonders, PhD, FACSM,  
lead study author*

Director of Exercise Science at Wright State University, and her team examined the impact of a 12-week post-surgical program of individualized exercise aligned with the American College of Sports Medicine Guidelines for Cancer Survivors. They found program participants improved on all health-related quality-of-life measurements, while the control group declined or remained the same. Also examining for the first time the relationship between exercise intervention and utilization of healthcare resources, researchers found that patient emergency department (ED), hospital and office-based visits significantly declined, lowering healthcare costs.

Canadian researchers, led by Frances Wright, MD, MEd, FRCSC, lead study author and Professor of Surgery at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Center, Toronto, ON, presented data on the impact of individualized prehabilitation programs combining exercise with dietary and stress management counseling on breast cancer patients prior to surgery as they underwent neoadjuvant (pre-surgical) chemotherapy (NACT). Immediately after chemotherapy and six months post-cancer surgery, program participants demonstrated better functional walking capacity and self-reported general quality-of-life and fatigue measurements as well as other improvements compared to

the control group.

Dr. Wonders' prospective clinical trial involved 243 patients randomized to the exercise and control groups. Interventions consisted of 150 minutes of cardiovascular exercise weekly, primarily walking or recumbent bicycling at a low to moderate intensity. Each week, the group also engaged in two to three 60-minute sessions of full body workouts weekly using free weights or exercise stretch bands.

Both groups were assessed pre- and post-intervention using the Functional Assessment of Cancer Therapy-Breast (FACT-B), the Short Form-36 Health Survey (SF-36) and the Brief Fatigue Inventory (BFI).

"These well-recognized measurement tools focus on physical, social, emotional and functional well-being, rating performance on a scale of one to 28. Controlling for demographic factors and comorbidities, differences between the two groups were significant," comments Dr. Wonders. "There was a linear relationship between exercise and decrease in health care utilization." ED visits decreased by 33.2%, hospital outpatient visits by 21.5% and office-based visits by 41.8%.

"With a growing recognition of the importance of exercise, currently it is written into the standards or guidelines of several major national U.S. breast cancer organizations," she comments. "Our study adds to the body of literature supporting it, not only by demonstrating benefits but also by showing that exercise can help cut healthcare costs."

Dr. Wright's research breaks new ground in examining prehabilitation (a program focused on optimizing health during the pre-operative time period) for breast cancer patients as they embark on a stringent course of varied of cancer therapies for up to 12 months. While the main aim of the study was to assess the feasibility of such a program, the study also yielded significant data on its benefits. With almost half of the women approached agreeing to participate and 87% completing the program, authors conclude that prehabilitation is feasible and well-received by patients.

In the study, 72 participants were randomized into the intervention and control groups. The attrition rate over the course of the study was 13%. Prehabilitation consisted of an individual counseling session with a nutritionist and psychiatrist. After evaluation by a physiotherapist, participants were assigned a customized exercise program centering on several 30-minute cardiovascular exercise sessions each week complemented by upper body strength training.

They were administered physical fitness tests and a variety of well-recognized self-rating health-related questionnaires for baseline, post-NACT and post-surgical data. In addition to these quantitative measures, qualitative interview data suggested that the program had a substantial positive impact on the treatment experience overall.

"The impact of our prehabilitation was quite positive with no intervention-related adverse events reported," comments Dr. Wright. "While a more extensive trial is warranted to determine

efficacy, our program will be operationalized shortly through a non-profit that will offer it on a virtual platform nationally throughout Canada for women who wish to participate. We are very excited about the prospects.”

Both researchers agree that exercise and wellness programs for breast cancer patients are a win-win.

#### ABOUT THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF BREAST SURGEONS:

The American Society of Breast Surgeons is the leading medical society focusing exclusively on the surgical treatment of breast disease. It is committed to continually improving the practice of breast surgery by being an advocate for surgeons who seek excellence in the care of breast patients. This mission is accomplished by serving as a forum for the exchange of ideas and by promoting education, research, and the development of advanced surgical techniques.

The Society was founded in 1995 and now has more than 3100 members in the United States and in 35 countries throughout the world. The Society’s Annual Meeting is the only medical meeting dedicated exclusively to the latest issues affecting surgeons who treat breast disease, from diagnosis and staging to treatment planning and ongoing management.

**ABOUT BREAST SURGEONS:** Breast surgeons are today’s multi-disciplinary breast health experts. As the medical professionals who are the focal point of most facets of a woman’s breast care, breast surgeons are in the forefront of new developments in breast cancer prevention, risk-assessment, screening, diagnosis, and a wide range of surgical and non-surgical treatment options. Today, rapidly advancing research, techniques and technologies have resulted in great improvements in the early detection and treatment of breast cancer. Breast surgeons are on the front lines every day with these developments and the fight against one of the most common women’s cancers.

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Jeanne-Marie Phillips  
Healthflash Marketing  
+1 203-977-3333  
[jphillips@healthflashmarketing.com](mailto:jphillips@healthflashmarketing.com)

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