The Emotional Impact of Breast Cancer.

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Pearls of Wisdom
It Begins at Diagnosis

- Cancer is an unraveling journey. Cancer experience adds a layer of anxiety and depression.

- Factors that influence how one can be affected by their cancer diagnosis.
  - Unresolved prior grief/loss,
  - underlying emotional health,
  - previous unraveling experiences
The New Normal

- Present influences of:
  - Cancer treatments
  - Support of medical team
  - Body Image
  - Relationship Supports
  - Role Changes
  - Emotional Health
  - Finances
  - Fears of Recurrence
Honoring Grief and Loss

• It’s time to let go of who we think we are supposed to be and become who we are.
  - Let go of the need to please and be perfect.

• Honor and look at the grief that is activated
  - Denial
  - Anger
  - Bargaining
  - Depression
  - Acceptance
Facing Strong Emotions

- Facing Strong Emotions / Primal Fear of Death being Activated (from Irvin D Yalom)

  - Fear of life: Anxiety about loss of connectedness and isolation

  - Fear of death: Fear of extinction, fear of dissolving into the whole and loss of individuality
Coping with Strong Emotions

• Going forward with strengths of our individuality and under anxiety going back to a less vulnerable or more protected state

• Recognize and honor our head and our heart going forward - compassion and meaning making
Joy and Fear

- Joy and gratitude are necessarily intertwined. We have to make this a practice.
  • To soften into joy, you have to practice gratitude.
  • However, it is exposing your vulnerability to experience joy.
    • Ex: Standing over your sleeping child and you realize how much you love that one – more than you realized even possible to love. But if something ever happened to him, I couldn’t take it.
Joy and Fear continued

When we lose our tolerance for vulnerability, joy becomes foreboding. We try to beat vulnerability to the punch.

Some people try to just stay middle of the road. No big highs. Expect the worst and if things go ok, it’s a pleasant surprise. Stop dress rehearsing tragedy.

- Gratitude is practice – journaling. Go through the day on the lookout.
- New eyes in creating a narrative
Keep it Real

Authenticity is a practice and a choice every day. Ya gotta let go of the fake out.

- Being around people who are pretending to be comfortable encourages you to do the same.

- Let go of perfectionism. It doesn’t exist

- For every yes, there is something that’s getting a no.
GOING FORWARD IN A NEW WAY

Data on coping strategies – Being stress hardy to cope and thrive includes 4 characteristics:

- Commitment
- Control
- Challenge
- Closeness
Commitment

• Be fully involved in what you are doing and give it your best effort. Be curious about whatever is happening versus feelings of alienation from other people or environment.

• Processing our emotions
  • Now that we see that facing what we are feeling, identifying what we are feelings has a value and purpose, how do we take the next processing steps to work through these feelings?
More on Commitment

• Understand there are many different paths

• A curiosity of our experience and discovery of our path.

• Understand that it isn’t a race – people will progress at their own pace
Commitment continued

- Be Aware. Journal. Talk to a therapist about what you are feeling.

- What will aide in my health and recovery? What can I put in place for this?
Control

- People who feel that they are in control believe that they can influence events and surroundings, that they can make things happen.

- A strong sense of self-efficacy and an internal locus of control versus feelings of powerlessness or feeling like a victim or circumstances.
How to Gain Control and Stability

• Physical and Emotional Care
  • Breathe – deep breathing is one of the most important ways to lower stress in the body and mind.

• Exercise! Walk, swim, and join a gym or class. The best exercise is the one you enjoy!

• Eat a balanced diet.
More Ways to Gain Control

• Get outside for at least a little bit each day; the importance of nature in our life!

• MONITOR your screen time as too much can impact our mood.

• Take time to rest and sleep. This gives us the opportunity to recover from stressful events.
Even More Ways to Gain Control

• Research shows the influence on not only our body, but also our emotions/mental well-being with improved mood with exercise, the food we eat, too much screen time, and having enough sleep.

• Release Tension – exercise, practicing progressive relaxation exercises, deep breathing, yoga, massage, and guided imagery.
Control

• Creativity – drawing, sewing, pottery, crafts, dance, coloring mandalas...

• Identify what is meaningful. Plan your commitments around what is meaningful so what gives you most meaning doesn’t get pushed to the periphery.
Challenge

**Challenge:** People who take on life as a challenge, welcome new situations for their opportunities to learn, to grow, to develop on a personal level, rather than looking at everything new as a possible threat.

- Silver linings of situations and experiences – what have I gained and learned?
- New Eyes needed for situations instead of trying to change a situation.
Challenge

- Be aware of disempowering statements and change them to empowering statements.

- Find gratitude – document daily events and/or blessings. Recognize that these transform our experience and feelings.

- It is a challenge to create new habits and patterns in our lives. Be gentle on yourself in this process! Get the support you need and deserve!
Closeness

• Everyone who wants to be stress hardy must have someone with whom to share the stress. A confidant who is willing to be there when the times are tough.
Seek extra support

• Seek time with family and friends

• Categories of what others are able to give to us: listeners, doers, and distractors

• Support groups – helps to be with others who have similar experiences
More Support

• Seek counseling to have the safety and forum for creating the life you want to embrace going forward.

• This is hard stuff and we all deserve the compassion and support of others in creating the quality of life we want.
Compassion

“Everyone alive has suffered. It is the wisdom gained from our wounds and from our own experiences of suffering that makes us able to heal...”

“The healing of our present woundedness may lie in recognizing and reclaiming the capacity we all have to heal each other, the enormous power of the simplest of human relationships: the strength of touch, the blessing of forgiveness, the grace of someone else taking you just as you are and finding in you an unsuspected goodness.”

Rachel Naomi Remen, MD
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Kobasa, Suzanne. Researcher at City University in New York with concept development of “Stress Hardiness.”