

# Addressing Body Image Struggles as Part of Breast Cancer Care:

## *Best Practices*

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# Learning Objectives

- Foundations of body image for breast cancer survivors
- Best practices for approaching conversations about body image
- Content areas for clinical assessment of body image difficulties
- Basics of body image treatment

# Disclosure

I receive royalties from Oxford University Press

What is body image?

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# What is Body Image?

- The personal relationship you have with your body
- The way you perceive, think, and feel about all aspects of your body
- It does not just refer to physical appearance, or how you feel about the way you look
- Body image is completely subjective
- Body image can change over time

# What influences body image?

▸ Personal  
Background

▸ Society

▸ External  
Events



# Body Image & Cancer

- All breast cancer survivors undergo a process of body image adaptation
- Body image issues are not based on location or extent of cancer
- Body image concerns can arise prior to, during, and/or after treatment
- Body image concerns are completely normal and to be expected



# Further Considerations

- Gradual vs. acute onset of changes
- Temporary changes vs. long-lasting changes (uncertainty)
- Late effects
- Visible vs. not visible changes
- Shame/guilt/embarrassment
- Reluctance to share



# Common Types of Body Image Concerns for Breast Cancer Survivors

scarring/  
disfigurement

Swelling/  
lymphedema

Skin  
discoloration

Hair loss

Sensory changes  
(neuropathy)

fatigue

pain

Fertility issues

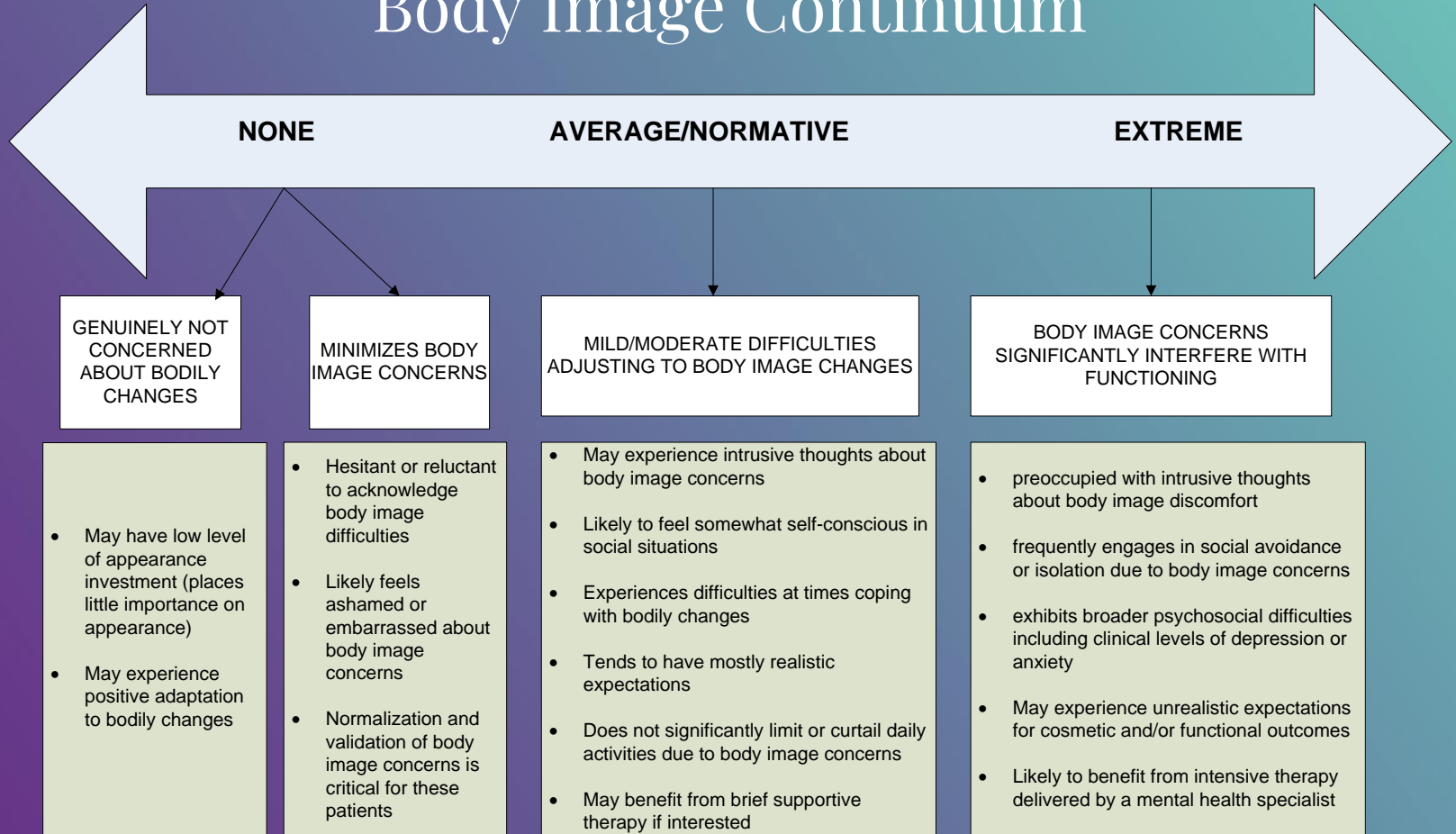
Sexual  
dysfunction

Weight gain

Weight loss

Decreased  
physical  
strength/stamina

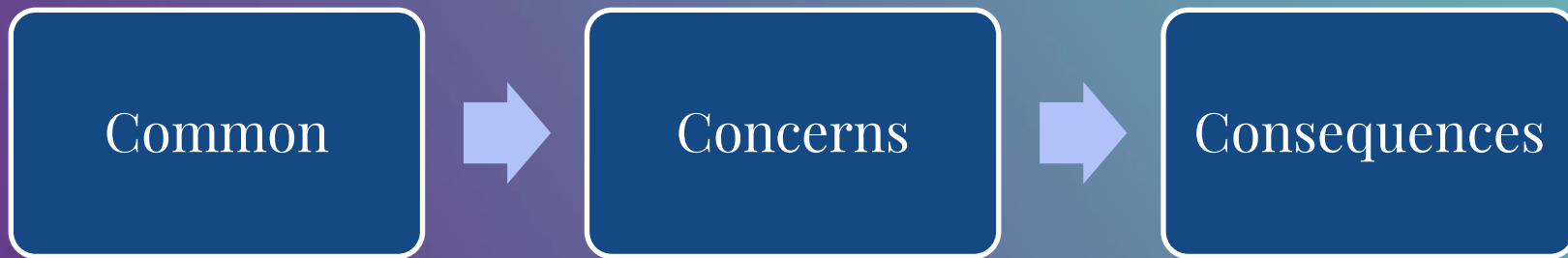
# Body Image Continuum



# Basics: Body Image Assessment

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# Approaching Conversations about Body Image: The Three C's





# Clinical Assessment of Body Image Outcomes

- Importance/meaning of affected body part
- Description of body part(s) affected
- Description of how body has changed
- Expected/unexpected nature of body changes
- Expectations of future changes to the body
- Preoccupation with body image changes
- Distress related to body image changes
- Avoidance of activities due to body image concerns
- Grooming behaviors/rituals
- Reassurance seeking related to body image
- Concerns about sexuality/intimacy

# Basics: Body Image Treatment

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# Body Image Treatment

1

Facilitating  
treatment  
decisions related  
to body image

2

Coping with  
recent body  
image changes

3

Promoting body  
image  
acceptance

Facilitating  
Treatment  
Decisions  
Related to Body  
Image

Normalize/validate  
body image  
concerns

Promote  
autonomy/choice

Goals/values  
clarification

Set realistic/  
flexible  
expectations for  
outcomes

# Fundamental Considerations

- Continue to normalize/validate body image concerns
- Create a safe space to explore treatment options
- Identify goals/values related to body image and medical treatment
- Facilitate communication with the treatment team

# Setting Realistic/Flexible Expectations

- My scars will completely disappear over time
- The next surgery is going to resolve my body image concerns and “fix” what is wrong with how I look
- I’m going to look better than I did before



## Tips for Managing Expectations

- Learn about what a patient is most concerned about/focused on
- Encourage them to bring a loved one to appointments
- Be sure to discuss range of outcomes
- Ask them about internet searches/outside information sought
- Help them adjust expectations along the way
- Help them acknowledge relative improvements
- Be attuned to what they are experiencing emotionally

# Coping with Recent Body Image Changes

Gradual  
exposure/systematic  
desensitization to  
mirror viewing

Mind/body  
relaxation

Problem solving/  
communication skills

Cognitive  
restructuring

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# Mirror Viewing

- Process reactions with the patient
- Listen for biased, judgmental, emotional descriptions
- Promote use of objective, neutral language to describe body and appearance



# Problem Solving: Social Situations

- Challenge all-or-nothing thinking, Mind-Reading & Fortune Telling
- Normalize and validate self-consciousness
- Review and model use of non-verbal communication strategies
- Be prepared for comments/questions
- Ways to deal with well-meaning comments about appearance

# Intimacy

- Get back to the basics of Communication (Sharing & Listening)
- Acknowledge physical effects of cancer and its treatment on sexual desire, sexual arousal and energy
- Talk about sex (sort out any misunderstandings and fears)
- Create intimate moments without pressure for sex
- Change routine/patterns to fit when tend to have more energy during the day
- When things don't go well – regroup and debrief



# Dating

- Body language
- Decide what to share, when, how (can reveal information over time)
- Allow partner to ask questions
- Be patient and give yourself time
- Be alert to mind-reading, assumptions you are making
- Regroup!



Promoting  
Body Image  
Acceptance

Mindfulness

Promoting  
Cognitive  
Flexibility

Body Esteem  
Activities



# What is Body Image Acceptance?

- Coming to terms with the fact that there are aspects of your body that you like and don't like
- Unconditional care and respect for your body (despite changes that have occurred as a result of illness/treatment)
- Ability to recognize and celebrate aspects of your body you enjoy
- Learning to cope with any negative thoughts and feelings you have toward your body

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# BODY ESTEEM

- How much you value your body
- Comfort and confidence you have with your body



# Promoting Body Esteem

▶ Appearance-  
enhancing  
activities

1

▶ Sensory  
pleasing  
activities

2

▶ Health &  
fitness-related  
activities

3





# BODY IMAGE SERVICES FOR CANCER SURVIVORS

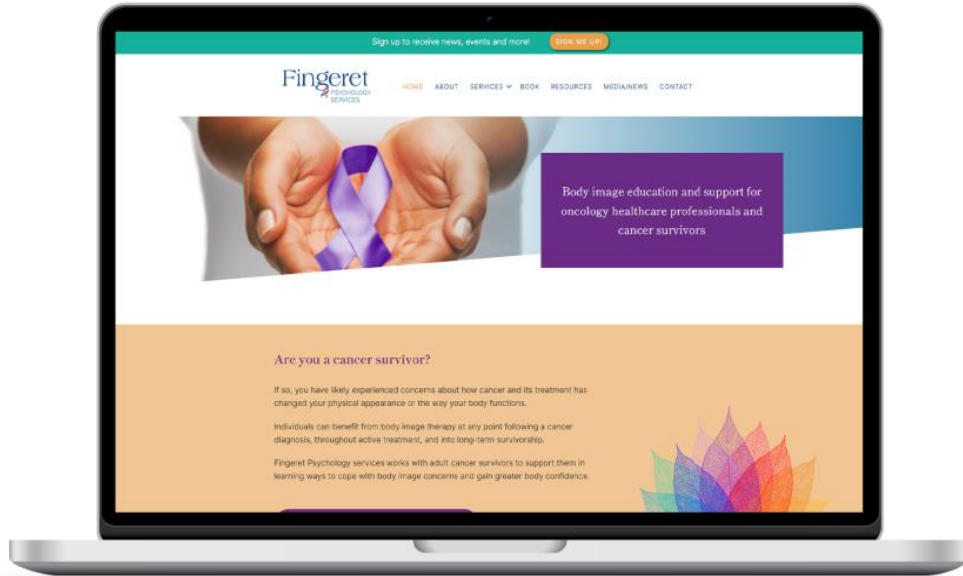
*Helping Your Patients Face Their Bodies  
with Greater Confidence*

## Services for Cancer Survivors

- ✓ Individual therapy for adult cancer survivors with mild, moderate, or severe body image disturbance
- ✓ Group therapy
- ✓ Patient and caregiver workshops
- ✓ Guest speaker at cancer support groups or other events for cancer survivors

## Services for Healthcare Professionals

- ✓ Customizable education and training sessions on best practices for body image care
- ✓ Development of patient education materials tailored for your patients
- ✓ Consultation on research related to body image
- ✓ Speaker services at symposia, conferences, or other events for healthcare providers




[www.fingeretpsychologyservices.com](http://www.fingeretpsychologyservices.com)



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# Body Image Books

## **Body Image Care for Cancer Patients: Principles and Practices**

By: Fingeret, M.C., & Teo I. (2018)



[Learn more here](#)

Buy the book: [Oxford University Press](#) or [Amazon](#)

## **The Body Image Workbook**

By: Cash TF. (2008) – An eight-step program for learning to like your looks., 2nd ed. Oakland: New Harbinger Publications.



## **Body image: A handbook of theory, research, & clinical practice.**



By: Cash TF, Smolak L. (2011) – 2nd edition ed. New York: The Guilford Press.

## **Body Image and Disfigurement Care**



By: Newell, R. (2005) – London, Routledge.

## **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for Body Image Disturbance**

Pearson, A., Heffner, M., Follette, V. (2010) – A practitioner's guide to using mindfulness, acceptance, and values-based behavior change strategies. Oakland: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.



## **Oxford Handbook of the Psychology of Appearance**



By: Rumsey, N. and Harcourt, D. (2012) – Oxford University Press.

[More information here](#)

## **Psychological Aspects of Reconstructive and Cosmetic Plastic Surgery**

By: Sarwer D.B, et al. (2006) – Clinical, empirical and ethical perspectives. Philadelphia, London, Lippincott, Williams & Wilkins.



## **Handbook of Positive Body Image and Embodiment**



By: Tylka T.L., Piran N. (2019) – New York, Oxford University Press.

# Psychosocial Oncology Resources

## American Psychosocial Oncology Society



[apos-society.org](https://apos-society.org) – The only multidisciplinary organization in the US dedicated to researching and treating the psychosocial aspects of cancer.

## Association of Oncology Social Workers



[aosw.org](https://aosw.org) – International non-profit organization dedicated to the enhancement of psychosocial services to people with cancer and their families.

## Oncology Nursing Society



[ons.org](https://ons.org) – A professional association committed to promoting excellence in oncology nursing and the transformation of clinical care.

## American Cancer Society



[cancer.org](https://cancer.org) – Cancer information, answers, and hope. Available every minute of every day.

## American Society of Clinical Oncology



[asco.org](https://asco.org) – A diverse network of oncology professionals dedicated to providing the highest quality resources in education, policy, the pioneering of clinical research, and above all, advancing the care of patients with cancer.

## Association of Community Cancer Centers



[accc-cancer.org](https://accc-cancer.org) – Leading education and advocacy organization for the cancer care community.

## CancerCare



[cancercaresupport.org](https://cancercaresupport.org) – The leading national organization providing free, professional support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical, and financial challenges of cancer.

## International Psycho-Oncology Society



[ipos-society.org](https://ipos-society.org) – Fosters international multidisciplinary communication about clinical, educational, and research issues that relate to the subspecialty of psycho-oncology.

## Psycho-Oncology Journal



[onlinelibrary.wiley.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com) – An international peer-reviewed journal that is concerned with the psychological, social, behavioral, and ethical aspects of cancer.

## Cancer Support Community



[cancersupportcommunity.org](https://cancersupportcommunity.org) – Largest professionally-led network of cancer support worldwide, dedicated to ensuring that all people impacted by cancer are empowered by knowledge, strengthened by action, and sustained by community.



THANK YOU!

Questions?

