

Body Image Concerns

A Normal Part of the Cancer Experience

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Ask the Experts: Let's Talk About Breast Cancer
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Overview

- What is body image?
- What is body image therapy?
- What are practical tips/strategies to help address body image concerns related to breast cancer?

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

- Age
- Gender
- Cultural beliefs
- Physical characteristics
- Family messaging around body/appearance

Society

- Societal ideals regarding appearance
- Mass media
- Social media

External Events

- Cancer



Common Types of Body Image Concerns

scarring/
disfigurement

Swelling/
lymphedema

Skin
discoloration

Hair loss

Weight changes

Stoma (neck,
abdomen)

Use of a
prosthetic

Sensory changes
(numbness,
tingling, pain)

Sexual
dysfunction

Motor
impairment

Changes to
speech or
swallowing

Decreased
physical
strength/stamina

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

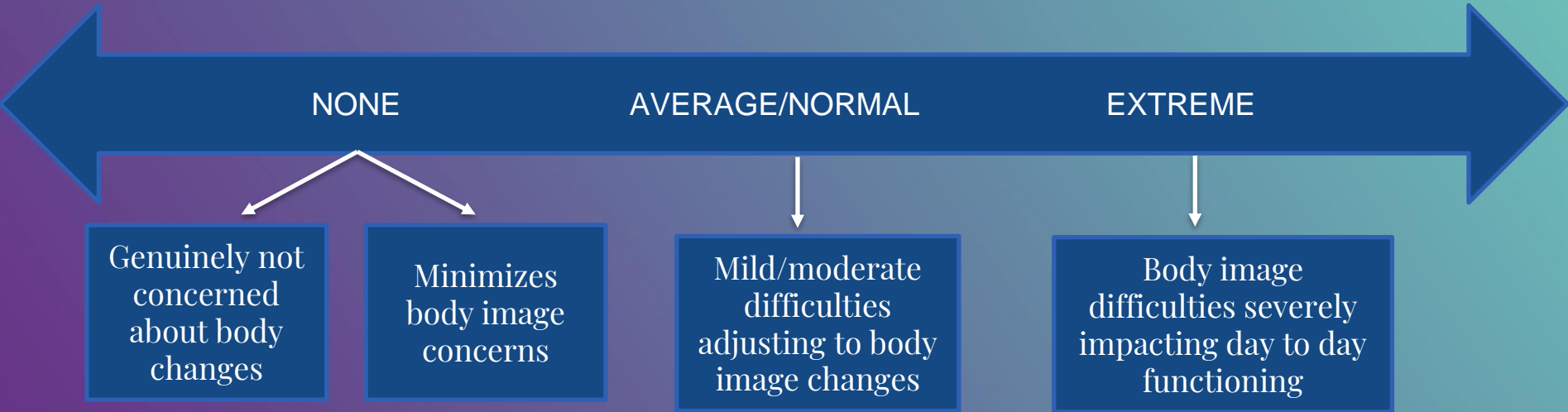


Further Considerations

- 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



Body Image Continuum



Body Image Therapy

- Learn new coping strategies for managing body image concerns
- Manage difficult emotions surrounding body image changes
- Set realistic expectations for body image outcomes
- Increase your self-confidence in social situations
- Better prepare for upcoming body and appearance changes
- Gain greater acceptance of body image outcomes



Tips for Talking to Healthcare Team about Body Image

- Talk openly about your concerns
- Explain importance/meaning of body part affected
- discuss concerns about current body changes and worries for future changes to body
- Explain the way body image concerns are affecting your life
 - emotional, social, occupational
- Ask for help/referral for therapy or other resources they can provide

Tips for Navigating Hair Loss



- Consider wigs & wig alternatives
- Learn techniques for recreating eyebrows
- Vet wig store ahead of time
- Enlist someone to shop with you
- Ask oncologist for prescription for cranial prosthetic
- www.wigged.com

Tips for Mirror Viewing

- Do not delay
- Start slowly
- Take a picture
- Dim the lights
- Use a mirror
- Be attuned to emotions and thoughts
- Practice relaxation
- Be compassionate!

Tips for Coping with Functional Changes

- Be patient with your body
- Focus on & appreciate small improvements
- Follow through with treatment recommendations
- Engage in activity pacing
- Recognize triggers & patterns
- Be alert to warning signs in your body

Tips for Social Situations

- Explore & challenge your body image assumptions
- Recognize mind-reading and fortune telling
- Normalize self-consciousness about body image
- Focus on non-verbal communication strategies
- Be prepared for questions about your health, comments about appearance



Tips for Intimacy

- Start the conversation
- Voice your concerns and acknowledge what has changed
- Be patient when it comes to intimacy
- Remember what has not changed
- Seek help /information



Top Body Image Lessons

- People are more influenced by the way you behave rather than how you look
- Your appearance is a much bigger issue for you than it is for other people
- Never underestimate the importance of wearing comfortable clothing
- Show compassion for yourself by trying to let go of harsh criticism of your body
- Learn how to accept a compliment about your body
- Learn how to give a compliment to your body



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 negative thoughts and feelings you have toward your body

Tips for Promoting Body Esteem

Appearance- Enhancing Activities

- Getting dressed up
- Manicure/pedicure
- Wearing favorite clothes
- Make-up
- Wearing a cheerful color
- New hat or wig

Sensory Pleasing Experiences

- Being outdoors
- Wearing something soft
- Sunrise/sunset
- Hugging
- Listening to music
- Scenic drive
- Stargazing

Health/Fitness Exercises

- Stretching
- Yoga
- Playing with kids/grandkids
- Walking
- Dancing
- Meditation
- Swimming
- gardening

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THANK YOU!

Questions?

