

Current Practice

ISSUE: JUNE 2015 | VOLUME: 12

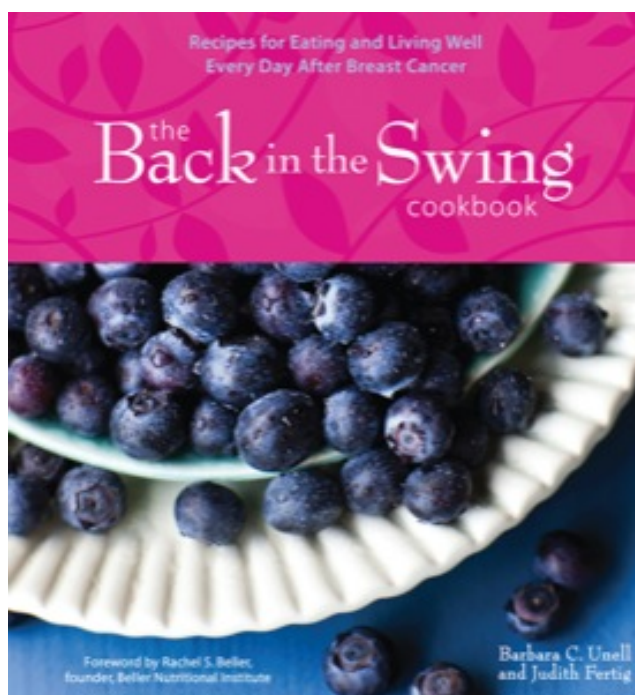
Encouraging Healthy Lifestyles in Breast Cancer Patients

San Antonio—A low-fat diet does not improve survival in women with breast cancer, according to results from the Women's Intervention Nutrition Study (WINS). The researchers said that because numerous studies have tied excess weight and weight gain to poorer breast cancer outcomes, patient interventions should focus on weight loss and physical activity instead of a low-fat diet.

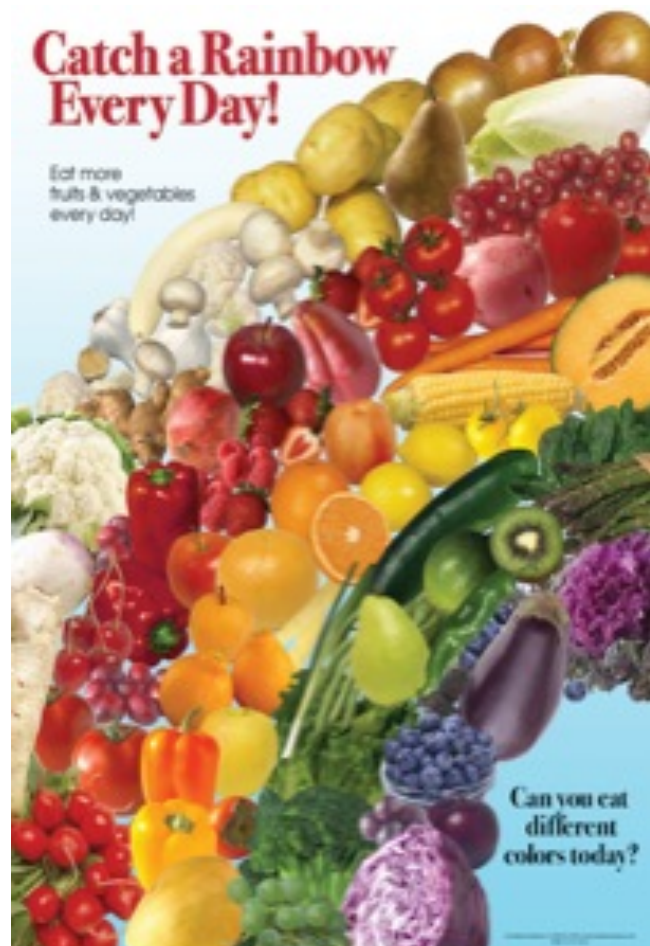
Starting in 1984, WINS enrolled 2,437 women with early breast cancer who had received primary surgery, with or without radiation, plus adjuvant systemic therapy. To be included, a woman's dietary fat intake had to be more than 20% of daily calories. Within a year from breast cancer surgery, women were randomized to a control group or to a dietary intervention that reduced fat intake from an average of about 30% of daily calories at baseline to 20%. The intervention lasted for an average of five years.

Lead investigator Rowan Chlebowski, MD, PhD, a medical oncologist at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center, in Los Angeles, who presented the study at the San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium (SABCS; abstract S5-08), said that with a follow-up of 20 years, there was no difference in survival between the two groups. (An exploratory analysis showed that the intervention improved survival in women who were both estrogen receptor–positive and progesterone receptor–positive, but Dr. Chlebowski said further analysis is needed to determine whether this post-hoc analysis should spur a randomized clinical trial.)

“Given emerging evidence over the last 20 years, future lifestyle interventions should best target weight loss/maintenance and increased physical activity,” he said.



Numerous reports have shown that obesity is associated with an increased risk for various cancers, that weight gain after a breast cancer diagnosis is associated with an increase in recurrence, and that exercise can protect against breast cancer recurrence (*Br J Cancer* 2011;105[S1]:s52-s73; PMID: 22048034; *J Clin Oncol* 2012;30:3697-3704; PMID: 23008316; *Epidemiology* 2012;23[2]:320-327; PMID: 22317813). One study showed that for every 11 pounds gained in the five years after a breast cancer diagnosis, women experienced a 13% increase in breast cancer–specific mortality ($P=0.01$) (*Cancer Epidemiol Biomarkers Prev* 2009;18[5]:1403-1409; PMID: 19366908).



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Rainbow” materials that encourage meals to involve a rainbow of colors. “Making sure you are eating a variety of colors every time you eat, is a very simple thing to do, and it can be very effective if you embrace it,” Dr. Sanft noted. “Some patients will tell me, ‘I realized that I was eating all white food, noodles and potatoes.’ Sometimes just being aware that you need more green or yellow or red on your plate can get a patient to eat a better, healthier plant-based diet.”

LIVESTRONG at the YMCA, a free, 12-week exercise program for adult cancer survivors, can be appealing for some individuals, whereas others may choose to exercise individually. “I tell my patients to move more,” Dr. Sanft said. “It doesn’t have to be dedicated, working-up-a-sweat

The first thing that clinicians should do to encourage patients with breast cancer to make healthy lifestyle choices that will reduce their risk for cancer recurrence is to talk about it, according to Tara Sanft, MD, the medical director of adult survivorship for the Yale Cancer Center Survivorship Clinic, in New Haven, Conn. “Sometimes, clinicians don’t know what to say, so they don’t bring it up at all. You need to have a conversation with the patient. What is your activity level? What are you doing for exercise? If you don’t talk about it, you will never be able to counsel patients,” she said.

She informs her patients about the cancer survivor recommendations from the American Cancer Society (ACS), including 150 minutes of exercise per week. “I discuss strategies for getting the 150 minutes in. That might include walking 30 minutes per day, five days a week, but if that is not going to work, maybe it is 10 minutes on your way to and from work, seven days a week,” Dr. Sanft said. To encourage a plant-based diet, she provides patients with “Catch a

exercise. It can be taking several small short walks throughout the day or just not having a lot of sitting time. There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that sedentary time itself is a predictor of poor outcomes in cancer patients. 'Move more' is a very easy motto to remember and can be individualized to each survivor."

Jennifer Klemp, PhD, MPH, the director of the Cancer Survivorship Center at the University of Kansas Cancer Center, in Kansas City, said she provides similar basic recommendations on diet and exercise to all of her patients. Partnering with a national nonprofit called Back in the Swing, clinicians at her center helped to produce the "Back in the Swing Cookbook," that provides breast cancer survivors with evidence-based information on diet and exercise, lifestyle, and how to live your "survivorship plan" every day.

"I tell patients, if you are already doing exercise, keep that up. If you are not, we want you to keep moving and take some steps in that direction. On days you don't feel well, take a break," Dr. Klemp said, adding that she gives patients permission to take days off, because some women think that if they don't exercise regularly, then why do it at all. Referrals to community exercise programs and suggestions for individual exercise are helpful. For women who are overweight, her center recommends staying weight stable during treatment and weight loss once treatment is completed.

According to Dr. Klemp, reframing diet and exercise as a component of a treatment plan can spark motivation. "A lot of our patients are on extended hormonal therapy for five or 10 years, so I try to frame it as, 'you need to think of diet and exercise as a prescription,'" Dr. Klemp said. "It doesn't mean you have to like it, because a lot of people don't like exercise, but we know the benefits of exercise. You take this pill every day to keep you breast cancer-free, and you need to think about diet and exercise as another thing that can hopefully do the same."

Another tactic for increasing a healthy lifestyle is to keep repeating the diet and exercise message to patients. "You can talk to your patients until you are blue in the face, but they have to be ready for change. That is why it is important to have multiple checkpoints, because it might be the right day with the right provider who says something that really triggers change for the patient," Dr. Klemp said. "For example, I have been getting a lot of referrals from our radiation oncologist who is very pro-lifestyle. She is the tipping point for some."

—*Kate O'Rourke*

Drs. Chlebowski, Klemp and Sanft reported no relevant financial relationships.
