



# CHRONIC PAIN AND WOMEN'S HEALTH NEWSLETTER

## BREAST CANCER AWARENESS



Breast cancer occurs during the lifetime of one in eight women and the incidence appears to be increasing. The good news is that with regular screening through mammograms, the death rates appear to be declining.

October is National Breast Cancer Month and it is a chance to “get the word out” about this disease. You can take con-

trol of your own health by learning more about the risk factors and the steps you can take to prevent the disease.

Breast cancer can occur in both men and women and is the second most common cancer. It is a disease that involves cells becoming abnormal and dividing. If these cells multiply out of control, they can become a malignant, cancerous tumor. Cancer can then travel to other parts of the body. The cells can also form a non-cancerous benign tumor. This type is not life-threatening and does not spread.

The spread of breast cancer occurs in the

bloodstream or lymph vessels. The lymph system is a system in the body for waste collection. It normally collects waste products, dead cells, and fluid for filtering.

When there are cancerous cells in the breast, the lymph system can collect these cells and transport them to other places in the body. They can also lodge in the filtering stations or lymph nodes, especially in the arm pit area.

Risk factors increase your chance of getting breast cancer. These include being female, over 60 years old, and having a personal or family history of

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## PHYSICAL THERAPY AND BREAST CANCER

Physical Therapists can help in the recovery process after surgery for breast cancer. It is important to perform the correct exercises after surgery to prevent loss of functional movement and

scar tissue.

Both stretching and strengthening after surgery are important for a full recovery. Cardiovascular exercise is also needed for

health and improvement of fatigue after surgery. Progressing aerobic exercise correctly is especially important after radiation or chemotherapy.

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**Clemens Physical Therapy PLLC**

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## Physical Therapy and Breast Cancer cont...

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Important measurements of your arm size and mobility should be taken before surgery. This helps to detect problems before they occur.

You will be educated on lymphedema, a complication that causes arm swelling. Awareness of the risk factors and attention to the arm size before and after can help prevent the potential lack of motion, discomfort, and potential for infection caused by lymphedema.

With the establishment of the right exercises, you can recover function quickly after surgery. If the proper exercises are not performed there is risk of the arm getting stiff and losing significant movement. It is not uncommon for daily activities such as dressing, housework, and putting on a seatbelt to become difficult if steps are not taken to keep the arm moving after surgery. All of this can be prevented by performing a simple routine of exercises.

There may be more complications following breast surgery where the back or abdominal muscles are used to reconstruct the breast. In addition to the complications of the breast surgery, there is also recovery from the extra incisions and repositioning of these muscles. This requires special attention to rehabilitation and exercise for a full recovery. There is also potential for pain in other areas due to the loss of stabilization of the torso from the muscles that are moved.

Scar tissue forms as a normal product of healing from the surgery. For you to have the best outcome with the least pain, it should be flexible. A physical therapist can show you how to do massage and movement to maintain the flexibility of the tissue as it is healing. If the tissue has already healed, a physical therapist can do manual therapy techniques to restore flexibility and function to the tissue. This can be especially important if

you plan to have an expander placed for further reconstructive surgery.

We can also help with a special type of tissue tightness called axillary webbing. This is a tightness in the connective tissue or fascia in the arm pit and arm area after surgery. It looks a little like spider web going down the arm. It can restrict movement and function.

Most problems can be prevented with a little knowledge and the correct actions. Unfortunately, most insurances do not cover preventative treatment. **At Clemens Physical Therapy, we highly value the importance of prevention. Because of this, we offer FREE mobility and arm size screening before and after surgery. We will also provide general information on the correct exercises, scar management techniques, and lymphedema precautions to help prevent future problems after surgery.** Just get clearance from your surgeon after surgery.

## Breast Cancer: Risk Factors You Can Change

You can't change your genes, gender, or age, but there are things you can do to cut your risk for developing breast cancer. Here are a few ways to tip the odds in your favor.

1. **Loose weight:** weight gained in adulthood, especially after menopause, increases risk due to having higher levels of biologically active estrogen. Belly fat is riskier than hip/thigh fat.
2. **Exercise:** Not only will this help with losing weight, but research has found that as little as 1-2 hours of brisk walking can significantly cut your risk of developing breast cancer
3. **Reduce Alcohol Consumption:** reducing alcohol to one or less drinks per day helps cut risk
4. **Watch what you eat:** Increase fiber and fruits and veggies and decrease your intake of saturated and hydrogenated fats

## Research: Studies Show Physical Therapy Beneficial for Breast Cancer Rehab

A study published in Cancer in 2008 found that pre- and postoperative arm measurements performed by physical therapists were effective in detecting lymphedema. Gergich et al found that early detection is important to prevent the complications of this type of arm swelling, including loss of mobility and potential for infections.

Early rehabilitation in patients going through modified radical mastectomy was found to be beneficial by Cinar et al. This study, published in Cancer Nursing, showed that an exercise program with arm exercises improved movement significantly more than no exercise. They also found no increase in risk of development of lymphedema.

In Breast Disease, McAnaw and Harris report that Physical Therapists are important in the cancer recovery team. They state that PT's provide "patient education, skillfully evaluate and treat musculoskeletal dysfunctions and provide individualized patient exercise prescriptions."

# Breast Cancer Awareness continued...

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breast cancer. Having a risk factor does not guarantee you will get breast cancer, but your likelihood increases. See “[Risk Factors You Can Change](#)” pg 2 to start decreasing your risk.

It is important to get regular screening for breast cancer. This is especially true if you have any of the risk factors. Mammography is considered the best way to catch breast cancer early. Unfortunately, some women do not take this important step. The reasons for this are often due to fear of pain, fear of being diagnosed with breast cancer, or not feeling that it is important or affordable.

While not as fun as a day at the spa, mammograms are not that bad. Most places that do them try to make them as easy and painless as possible. They try to get you in and out quickly. The professionals that perform the screens can help explain the procedure and they try to make you as comfortable as possible.

As for the fear of finding out “bad news”, it really is better to find out sooner than later. The earlier the diagnosis, the better the chances of less invasive treatment being successful. Because of early

detection, women have more options to have less of the breast tissue removed. The earlier cancer is caught, the less likely the entire breast will have to be removed.



Most health insurances will cover mammograms, including Medicare and Medicaid. There are also many low to no cost screening programs. Check out the Center for Disease Control and Prevention or the National Cancer Institute for more information. For information on programs for low to no cost screening in West Virginia, see the West Virginia Breast Cancer and Cervical Screening Program.

Treatments for breast cancer

include surgery to remove the tumor and radiation, chemotherapy, or other drugs to slow the growth or destroy the cancer cells. Sometimes they also remove the lymph nodes.

After surgery it is important to do the correct exercises to prevent losing the motion and the strength you need for everyday activities. Scar tissue mobility is also important to keep the skin and muscles flexible. See “[Physical Therapy and Breast Cancer](#)” pg 2 for more information.

Lymphedema can develop immediately or many months after surgery or radiation. This is the swelling of the arm because the lymph system is not able to do its job of returning the fluid to the body correctly. Fortunately, most women do not develop lymphedema, but it is important to detect it early to prevent complications. It is more common when the lymph nodes have been removed.

Take steps now to become knowledgeable about breast cancer. Do all you can to curb your risk factors and get regular mammograms after age 40 (or before if recommended by your health care practitioner).

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

National Cancer Institute: [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

West Virginia Breast Cancer and Cervical Screening Program: [www.wvdhhr.org/bccsp](http://www.wvdhhr.org/bccsp)

Oncology Section of the American Physical Therapy Association: [www.oncologypt.org](http://www.oncologypt.org)

Section on Women’s Health of the American Physical Therapy Association:  
[www.womenshealthapta.org](http://www.womenshealthapta.org)



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**Helping People Who Hurt**



## Chronic Pain and Women's Health Newsletter

Dr. Clemens is a physical therapist who specializes in the treatment of women's health and chronic pain in men and women.

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**FREE screens provided for people pre and post surgery for breast cancer**

**Call for more information**

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Osteoporosis

Interstitial Cystitis

Foot Pain

Breast Cancer and Cancer Rehab

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