

IDEAS AND RESOURCES FOR RECOVERY

MAMMOGRAPHY AFTER TREATMENT

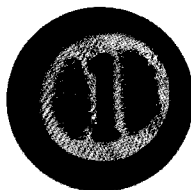
Minimizing stress and emotional anxiety during follow-up

BY JILL MAX

It's been 16 years since Beverly Glassman had a lumpectomy, and even though she has had no further evidence of disease, she's still nervous about having her annual mammograms. "Whenever I go, I still am apprehensive—are they going to find something?" Glassman says.

The nervousness Glassman feels about the prospect of having a mammogram is very common among women who have had breast cancer, "especially if the disease was diagnosed that way," says Randy Gross, a clinical nurse specialist at the Evelyn H. Lauder Breast Center at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York City. "It's a fear they relive every time." And because mammograms are often required every six months for the first few years after treatment, women are faced with the process more frequently than they might be otherwise.

Several factors contribute to fears associated with the test. For one thing, breast cancer treatment—whether surgery, radiation or chemotherapy—can cause changes in the breast tissue that require additional films, says Katherine Fagan, a mammography technologist at Little Silver Mammography in Little Silver, New Jersey. Radiation or surgery can thicken and toughen the skin, making it more difficult to get a clear image. Women who have had chemotherapy may have received their treatment by way of a portacath—a catheter placed in the chest—which can also cloud the view. Even after removal, portacaths can leave dense pockets of tissue that show up on x ray film; additional views are then needed to rule out a tumor. When this happens, "sometimes people get a little nervous," Fagan says, "but it doesn't mean we've seen something, we're just making sure we have adequate information." **CONTINUED** ↩



SCHEDULE YOUR MAMMOGRAM EARLY IN THE DAY



BRING A FRIEND OR RELATIVE



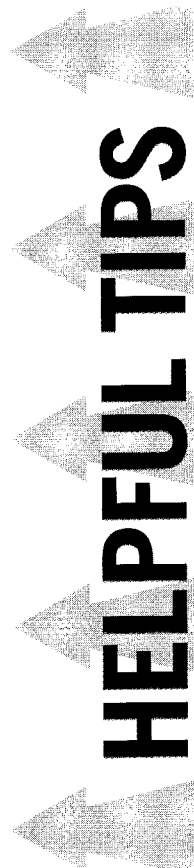
BRING PREVIOUS FILMS IF POSSIBLE



AVOID CAFFEINE ON THE DAY OF THE APPOINTMENT



PRACTICE BREATHING AND RELAXATION EXERCISES



CONTINUED

Women also worry about having a mammogram on a breast that's already tender because of radiation or surgery. Fagan says some patients are afraid that getting a mammogram after treatment will hurt, but the anticipation is usually worse than reality. "If you talk to patients about what to expect in realistic terms, they can usually handle the compression," she says. As breast tissue heals over time, anxiety is often diminished, but that's not always the case. Fagan says some patients are never comfortable with having a mammogram after treatment.

There are several ways women can prepare for a mammogram after treatment to help minimize their anxiety. Fagan recommends bringing a friend or relative along for support. She also suggests women bring previous films so they don't have to wait for them to be sent from elsewhere for comparison. Gross recommends going to a breast center or an accredited facility that specializes in mammograms to ensure efficient and quality care. Another strat-

egy is to avoid caffeine before you go. "It can be a stimulant and make you more anxious," explains Susan Temple, an oncology nurse with GlaxoSmithKline. Temple also tells her patients to keep themselves in the best possible condition by eating well, and she also suggests exercising regularly to reduce stress levels, as well as trying to avoid scheduling a mammogram before a major holiday or during a particularly stressful time. Going to an appointment first thing in the morning may also help women avoid spending the day dreading what lies ahead.

Even in the doctor's office, there are ways to reduce the stress of getting a mammogram after breast cancer treatment. Temple recommends relaxation exercises, such as breathing, centering, or guided imagery. Relaxing can also make getting a mammogram less physically distressing. "Our breasts sit on the pectoralis muscle," Fagan points out, "and when we're tense, the muscle pushes the breasts back. Relaxing helps make compression more comfortable." ■

THE SOUND OF MUSIC

Program brings live and recorded music to patients in need

BY KATIE NEITH

Recent studies have suggested that music therapy can help people with illness reduce the amount of pain and anxiety they experience. Now Musicians on Call, a New York City-based nonprofit organization, brings the healing power of music directly to cancer patients.

"We use music to complement the healing process for patients in the interest of improving their quality of life and creating a better environment," says Leslie Faerstein, executive director of Musicians on Call, which was founded in 1999. The organization recruits volunteer musicians to perform live in front of patients at health care facilities throughout New York City. At the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, musicians play for breast and reproductive cancer patients once a week on the in-patient floor and once a month at the center's Adult Out-Patient facility. Past live performances have included popular local artists, such as pop singer Michael LeMonde and the roots rock band, Joe Durso and Stone Caravan.

Musicians on Call also donates CDs and CD players to

health care facilities, so that patients can have access to recorded music during treatment or while in the waiting room. The organization offers many types of music, including some created by cancer survivors such as Matthew Zachary, a pianist who was diagnosed with a rare brain

tumor at the age of 21. In addition, concert ticket donations give patients and their families a chance to attend popular concerts, such as those by Savage Garden and The Who.

While Musicians on Call now operates mainly in New York City, Faerstein hopes to expand its programs across the United States, and possibly to other countries.

Musical performances have the ability to reach people who may be holding in their feelings, according to Connie Petruk, a jazz and rock musician who has been volunteering with Musicians on Call over the past year. "Music really touches people," she says. "Even if it brings up sadness, it's still a way of tapping into emotions and providing a release [for the patients.]"

To reach Musicians on Call, dial 212-741-2709. ■

