

Poor mood persists for breast cancer patients

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NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - Breast cancer survivors report feeling more fatigue and negative emotions in a typical day than their cancer-free peers, but round-the-clock monitoring demonstrates that their vital signs and level activity are no different, according to an international study.

The results "clearly point to the importance of complementary medical and psychosocial strategies for supporting post-treatment cancer patients," conclude Dr. Paul Grossman of the University of Basel Hospital, Switzerland and colleagues in Germany and Canada.

While the physical and mental effects of cancer treatment are known to be long-lasting, how they correlate with actual physical processes like heart rate, breathing and activity levels are not well understood, Grossman and his team write in the medical journal *Psychosomatic Medicine*.

To investigate, the researchers compared 33 women who had undergone treatment for breast cancer within the past two years and were apparently disease free, and 33 women with no history of serious illness.

All wore a monitor called a LifeShirt System, developed by the Ventura, California company Vivometrics, for 24 hours. The monitor continuously measures heart rate, breathing and physical activity, and includes a computer for recording the wearer's own reports of mood and level of fatigue. Study participants also reported afterwards on their fatigue, mood, and levels of stress, depression and anxiety.

The women's moment-to-moment sense of their mood and energy improved with the length of time it had been since their treatment, as did physical activity, the researchers found.

However, no matter how active they were, or how long it had been since treatment, the breast cancer patients reported in hindsight being less happy and less energetic than the control group. Nonetheless, monitoring indicated that patients' activity levels, breathing rates, and heart rates were similar to those of the women in the comparison group.

"Our study shows that post-treatment patients may be as active as others in daily life but still are more likely to suffer from psychological distress and symptoms," the team concludes.

SOURCE: *Psychosomatic Medicine*, September 2008.