

*"The Choices team are here  
for your support"*



## A message from the Choices team

"Better late than never" is one of our favourite sayings at Choices – especially when it comes to the newsletter!

Nevertheless, the programs continue to thrive and develop and you have been kept up to date with session dates and times through the calendar and reminders sent out from time to time.

The annual Think Pink Think Choices Week (13 – 18 July) isn't far away and in this issue, we have highlighted some of the ways you can be a part of the celebrations. Think Pink Parties are a fun way to support Choices as well as through our signature events - the Think Pink Think Choices Masquerade Ball, Bras by the Stars and the Think Pink Trivia Night.

It is because of the generosity of so many sections of the community that the programs are able to continue to be free and accessible to anyone who experiences breast or gynaecological cancers as well as their families.

*The Choices team.*



## Calling for expressions of interest

There has been interest expressed by some professional groups at being able to connect with each other in terms of similar interests and issues. One such group is doctors. If you are a member of

the medical profession and have been diagnosed with either breast or gynaecological cancer and would like to be connected with your peer group please contact Leonie Young on 07 3232 7596.

# Depression and cancer: understanding the link



Being diagnosed and living with breast cancer can take its toll not only on your body, but also your mind. Depression in women with breast cancer is common, but is often overlooked and therefore, undertreated.

It is estimated that half the women diagnosed with breast cancer will develop depression within 12 months of diagnosis. Research shows that fewer women experience depression in the second, third and fourth years, however up to 15 per cent of women may still experience depression in the fifth year after diagnosis.

Depression should not be viewed as a consequence of having a chronic illness. It is a common mental health problem which can be treated and from which most people recover if they get the right treatment.

## Why does cancer put a person at greater risk of depression?

Ongoing aspects of breast cancer treatment such as fatigue and pain can put a person at greater risk of depression. It can also make depression harder to diagnose as these symptoms can be difficult to differentiate from symptoms associated with breast cancer. Some breast cancer treatments, including chemotherapy and hormonal therapies, can cause chemical changes in the brain which may put the person at greater risk of experiencing a mental health problem.

Clinical Adviser to beyondblue, Associate Professor Michael Baigent, has experience in treating psychiatric problems seen in women with breast cancer.

Michael suggests that often women with breast cancer are surprised by a diagnosis

of depression because many assume the symptoms are from the treatment.

It can also be very difficult for some people to deal with the diagnosis of another illness after the initial shock of a diagnosis of cancer, however, Michael says it's very important for overall wellbeing and recovery to recognise and treat depression early.

"At the time of diagnosis, many women go through a range of reactions, but they eventually reach a point where they can accept things and move on," he said. "It is when the person has prolonged feelings of depression, despair and hopelessness – that it is more likely to be depression.

"Talking and emotional support can help to reduce the stress of coping with breast cancer, but if things become more difficult, professional help may be needed.

My advice is to seek treatment. Treatment can be very effective and make a big difference to quality of life, particularly for people with a serious illness.

“One thing women can do is talk it over with their doctor and get advice about whether their feelings are part of a normal reaction, side effects from chemotherapy or radiotherapy, or whether it could be depression. It’s helpful to know the difference between the normal reactions associated with adjustment to the process of diagnosis, treatment and prognosis and signs and symptoms of depression.”

## The path to recovery

It’s important to remember that depression is treatable. There is a range of treatments and services for managing depression. Recovery is generally faster the earlier help is sought. The type of treatment will vary according to each individual and the severity of the illness, but a combination of self-help, professional help and treatment is usually most effective.

Psychological treatments, which are often referred to as ‘talking therapies’ have generally been found to be an effective way of treating mild to moderate depression. Psychological treatment may help by changing negative thoughts and feelings and helping people find new ways of thinking and behaving.

Some people may be prescribed antidepressants. Michael says many women with breast cancer are hesitant to begin another course of medication, however, he says in most cases, antidepressants can be taken in conjunction with treatment for cancer without complications.

“A lot of women are surprised and don’t like having yet another diagnosis, but many women respond very well to psychological treatments,” Michael said. “Some might need an antidepressant and the prospect of taking another course of medicine can cause a lot of concern, particularly about whether it will cause complications with medication they’re already taking.”

## When should I take extra care of my mental health?

Michael advises that while depression can occur in any person at any time, there are certain times when a person may be more at risk, particularly someone who has, or has had, cancer.

“Some women find they feel depressed once the treatment has concluded and regular medical follow up ceases,” he said. “All of a sudden the appointments stop and it’s a time when you can really feel alone and worried about what might happen.

“Other times are anniversaries of diagnosis or treatment. These times can trigger a depressive mood and feelings.”

## Family, friends and carers

Often, women with breast cancer tend to come to terms with their diagnosis before their family, friends and/or carers do. This means that those close to the person also run an increased risk of developing depression.

Michael says those who are close to someone with cancer need to be aware of not only the mental health of the person they are caring for, but their own mental health as well. The best first step is to read about the signs and symptoms of depression and anxiety and if necessary, speak to a General Practitioner or a health care professional about it.

“Of course, it is quite a stressful time for family members or carers and a time that can be particularly hard if the sick person’s adjustment is ‘out of synch’ with their family members,” he said. “I often see it during my clinic, particularly with women who have very advanced cancers. They have reached the point of adjustment to that and their family and friends haven’t and it’s very hard for them.

“People need to be vigilant about how they’re feeling – physically and mentally – and talk to someone if it doesn’t feel right.”

If you are concerned about any of these issues, Choices has an experienced team who are able to support you. Contact Janine on 07 3232 7064.

**beyondblue** and the Breast Cancer Network of Australia recently signed a partnership agreement to jointly address these issues. A joint fact sheet on depression and breast cancer is now available.

To order the fact sheet, or for information on depression, anxiety and related alcohol and drug problems, available treatments and where to get help, visit [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) or phone the beyondblue info line 1300 22 4636 (local call cost from a landline).



# Your questions answered

**Q** My wife is 42 and has had surgery and chemotherapy for breast cancer, she is experiencing severe hot flushes. She believes it to be menopausal symptoms and it's really getting her down, is there anything she can take to help her?

**A** Menopause refers to a woman's final menstrual period, it is a natural part of a woman's life cycle and usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55. Treatments for breast cancer can affect the age of menopause and can influence the available options for managing menopausal symptoms. Symptoms will vary from woman to woman but may include hot flushes, emotional lability, lowered libido, bladder symptoms, sleep disturbance, vaginal dryness and fatigue or tiredness. Most menopausal symptoms will resolve with time, but in the meantime there are some simple strategies that will help manage the hot flushes.

- Dress in layers and try cotton fibres
- Reduce caffeine and alcohol intake and avoid spicy foods
- Identify triggers for hot flushes e.g. stress, rushing, heat and cold
- Exercise regularly
- Maintain a healthy diet
- Try meditation, deep breathing exercises
- Acupuncture may be helpful
- Keep cool water with you at all times
- Medications such as Effexor, an antidepressant variety of drug may well help reduce hot flushes or Gabapentin a drug used to treat epileptic fits has been shown to be helpful, but these drugs may also have some side effects and will need to be prescribed by your doctor

Your wife should discuss these symptoms with her health care team as it is important to make sure that treatments she may take will not affect her risk of breast cancer coming back, for example some complementary medicines or herbal remedies for hot flushes, that can be bought over the counter may contain oestrogen which may not be safe to take for those women with oestrogen receptor positive breast cancer.

A useful resource is the National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre "Breast Cancer and Early Menopause" guide for younger women, it is on the net [www.nbocc.org.au](http://www.nbocc.org.au) and covers a range of strategies for managing menopausal symptoms.

**Q** Do vitamin supplements help people with breast cancer?

**A** Vitamins are substances in our diet which are necessary for our bodies to function normally. As long as you are eating a range of health foods such as fruit, vegetable, fish and meat you are probably getting a good supply of essential vitamins.

If you are not eating normally over a long period of time then a simple multivitamin may well help top up your body's stores, however it is important to discuss this with your doctor, breast care nurse, dietician or pharmacist who can advise you appropriately.

You may have read that large doses of vitamins can be helpful in treating cancer, but it may in fact be harmful to take excessive amounts of certain vitamins particularly Vitamins A and D. Some studies have demonstrated that in large amounts these vitamins may be associated with an increased risk of cancer development.

**Q** My close friend has recently been diagnosed with secondary breast cancer. What is it?

**A** In some women, cancer cells break away from the primary breast cancer and spread to other parts of the body in the bloodstream or lymphatic system. The cells may lie inactive for many years before they begin to grow again.

Some time after breast cancer treatment, if cancer cells have broken away and spread to other organs of the body they may begin to grow and cause symptoms. This is known as secondary breast cancer.

Secondary cancers are also called metastases, so another name for secondary breast cancer is metastatic breast cancer. The most common places that breast cancer cells spread to are the bone, liver, lung or brain. Secondary breast cancer can also affect the lymph glands. It is most likely to affect the lymph nodes in the armpits or the lower part of the neck.

Breast cancer cells do not usually spread to many places in the body at once. Although it is possible for secondary breast cancer to affect more than one place at a time, it more commonly affects just one or two parts of the body.

Importantly if the breast cancer has spread to the liver it does not mean the woman has liver cancer it means she has breast cancer cells in her liver, or if it is in her bones it does not mean she has bone cancer, she has breast cancer cells that are in her bones and so on – the diagnosis, treatment and outcome for liver or bone cancer or other types of organ cancer is likely to be different to that of a breast cancer that has affected those organs. People often muddle this and seek the wrong information particularly when sourcing from the internet.

Each woman's situation is individually assessed and the appropriate treatment given depending on where the breast cancer has spread to. A woman with secondary breast cancer affecting the bones will have different symptoms and may need different treatment from a woman with secondary breast cancer affecting the liver.

# Think Pink - Think Choices

Participation in Think Pink Think Choices Week 2009 is easy . . . It's as easy as, let's see – "Thinking Pink!"

Who needs an excuse to have fun with friends?  
When you do, why not add a touch of colour –

## PINK

You can register by calling us or heading to the website (details below) to host a Think Pink Party and we'll send you out a Party Pack containing everything you need to know to get your Think Pink fundraising started.

**New Merchandise Range:** Hunting for gift ideas? Our Think Pink -Think Choices campaign offers a brand new merchandise range. You'll love the new Pink Striped Beach Towel, Pink T-Shirts including a long-sleeved tee for those cooler months, stylish Pink Carry Bags and so much more. The designs feature our own Think Pink logo and are available in a wide range of sizes. Visit our website for the full merchandise range – <http://www.uhc.com.au/thinkpink>.



## THINK PINK THINK CHOICES WEEK – 13 to 18 JULY

### Think Pink Think Choices 97.3FM Outside Broadcast:

Join Robin, Terry and Bob from 97.3FM for a morning (5 - 9am) of free entertainment on Monday 13 July at the annual Think Pink Think Choices Outside Broadcast held at Queen Street Mall.

As a launch to the annual Think Pink Think Choices Week, the morning will be packed with giveaways, competitions and all things pink. The morning also includes a sneak peek of the Bras by the Stars Parade which will be taking place later in the day.



### Bras by the Stars Fashion Parade:

Bras by the Stars is an exciting and unique annual event which raises funds and awareness for the Think Pink Think Choices campaign. Each year we recruit leading Australian and international celebrities to decorate a bra in their own unique style for our Bras by the Stars Parade. This year's free parade will be held on Monday 13 July at Queen Street Mall between 12 - 1pm. Each bra is an expression of the individual, while conveying a vital message in support of those diagnosed with breast and gynaecological cancers.





**Think Pink Think Choices Charity Ball:**

If stepping out in style is more to your liking, why not organise a group of friends and attend the Think Pink Think Choices Masquerade Charity Ball at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre? Filled with an air of mystery and excitement, this year's Ball on Saturday 18 July promises to satisfy and delight your senses. From 6:30pm for pre-dinner drinks and 7:30pm for dinner and entertainment.

For just \$150 per person (tables of 10) join us for a night of enchanting mystique.

Special early bird offer: Tables of 10 at discounted price of \$1400 per table (incl. GST). If the total amount is received by 26 June 2009, you will go in the draw to win your table a chance to be driven by 'Get Hummered' to the ball!

**Date Claimers**

<i>think pink</i>	Think Pink Trivia Night	<b>25 July</b>
<i>think pink</i>	Choices Gala Fashion Parade	<b>15 October</b>
<i>think pink</i>	Melbourne Cup	<b>3 November</b>

For more information on how to support Choices please contact the Choices team on 07 3232 6548 or 07 3232 6228 or check out our website <http://www.uhc.com.au/thinkpink/>

Support Choices by purchasing a 2009 Entertainment Book. Entertainment Books cost \$60.00 and feature discount prices at best dining, hotel accommodation, theatres, sport and much more. You can contact Jo Argyris on 3848 1373 or 0407 141 646 to place your order. A percentage of each purchase through Jo will go to the Choices program.

**TAI CHI** *(Tai Chi Australia)*

Huang Ti, the Yellow Emperor of China, reputed to have lived around 2700 BC, noted during the aftermath of a flood that trapped water quite quickly became stagnant, began to smell foul and disease spread. He concluded that if people did not move they too would suffer and he formulated 'health dances' which his people were required to practice regularly.

Tai Chi grew from these times and is a holistic exercise, developed over thousands of years. Its purpose is to regain the balance between body and mind and to enable the free flow of Chi throughout the body (essential for physical, mental and emotional health).

Tai Chi (sometimes known as 'the art of the windblown willow') is drawn from the philosophy of Tao (the study and way of nature), traditional Chinese medicine, and Shaolin martial art.

This simple idea is easily transferred into our modern lifestyles and understanding of health. Tai Chi provides many benefits when practiced regularly over a lifetime.

The synergy of Tai Chi results in better balance and total body coordination. Muscles act together and rely

on each other to give greater stability, endurance and functional benefit. As we undertake daily tasks this sustains people well into old age

It is a moving meditation, with the mind focused on the slow flowing connected moves and natural, deep diaphragmatic breathing. This brings a sense of wellbeing and calm ... and a readiness to take on anything.

Tai Chi is a gentle progressive and refreshing activity. With practice, Tai Chi builds strength and improvements are gained in posture, balance and stability, coordination, concentration, breathing efficiency, cardiovascular efficiency, the circulation of blood and lymphatic fluids, muscle tone and joint flexibility.

Tai Chi at Choices is recommencing on Wednesday 22 July. Please check the Calendar for dates or contact Choices for further details.

