

# Behavioral Health from Diagnosis to Survivorship

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Following this session, the participants  
should be able to...

- Discuss the basic elements of behavioral health treatment for breast cancer patients beginning with diagnosis and continuing through survivorship.
- Identify the common risk factors and stressors related to emotional and mental wellbeing in breast cancer patients.
- Describe common behavioral health interventions to patients in their own practice.



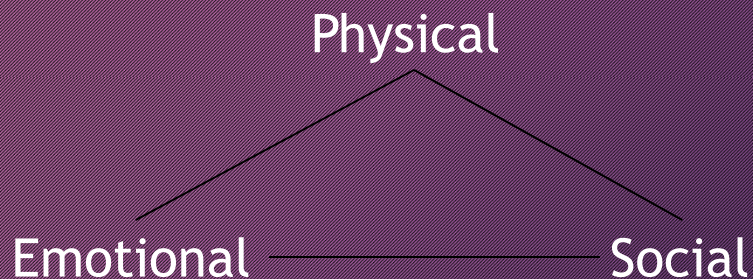
## What is “Behavioral Health”

“Behavioral health generally refers to mental health and substance use disorders, stressors and crises, and stress-related physical symptoms. Behavioral health care refers to the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of these conditions.”

“Behavioral health integration is the result of primary care teams and behavioral clinicians working together with patients to provide patient-centered care using a systematic approach.”

AMA, 2022

## Cancer’s Impact on Behavioral Health





## Physical

- Pain/Discomfort
- Fatigue
- Sleep Difficulties
- Sexual Changes
- Attention/Memory Changes
- Changes in Hormones/Induction of Menopause
- Changes to Thyroid
- Weight Changes
- Changes in physical abilities
- Physiological Changes
  - Scars
  - Reconstruction

Mayo Clinic, 2022

## Emotional

- Overwhelmed
- Fear
  - Prognosis
  - Treatment Side Effects
  - Recurrence
  - Mortality
- Anger
- Hope
- Stress and Anxiety
- Sadness and Depression
- Guilt
- Loneliness
- Gratitude

NIH, 2023



## Social

- Impact on work/career
- Impact on financial wellbeing
- Cost of treatment
- Cost of transportation
- Navigating hospital systems/insurance companies
- Distance from friends/family
- Changes in relationship dynamics
- Relationship changes
- Being “ghosted”
- Stigma
- Health Disparities

Kroenke, et al., 2006; MD Anderson, 2023; Sebri, et al., 2021

## Mental Health Diagnoses in Breast Cancer Patients

In a meta-analysis of 39 studies from across the globe:

- Non-specific distress (39%)
- Anxiety (34%)
- Posttraumatic stress(31%)
- Depression (20%)
- Adjustment Disorder\*

Fortin, et al., 2021



## Risk Factors for Psychopathology

- Age (30s/40s)
- Gender
- Living in a rural area
- Poor social support
- Financial/economic stress
- Work/employment-related stress
- Relationship-related stress
- Diagnoses prior to cancer diagnosis
- Adjustment to treatment-related changes
- Barriers to care
- Comorbid medical diagnoses

Fortin, et al., 2021; Ganz, 2008; Mental Health America, 2023

## Assessment and Screening

- Informally
  - Asking
  - Patient report
  - Chart review
- Formally
  - Assessments
  - NCCN Distress Thermometer
  - Patient Health Questionnaire 9-Item Version (PHQ-9)
  - Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-Item Version (GAD-7)
  - Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Checklist for DSM-5 (PCL-5)



# NCCN Distress Thermometer

**NCCN** National Comprehensive Cancer Network®

**NCCN Guidelines Version 1.2022**  
Distress Management

**NCCN DISTRESS THERMOMETER**  
Distress is an unpleasant experience of a mental, physical, social, or spiritual nature. It can affect the way you think, feel, or act. Distress may make it harder to cope with having cancer, its symptoms, or its treatment.  
Instructions: Please circle the number (0–10) that best describes how much distress you have been experiencing in the past week, including today.

**Extreme distress**

10  
9  
8  
7  
6  
5  
4  
3  
2  
1  
0  
**No distress**

**PROBLEM LIST**  
Have you had concerns about any of the items below in the past week, including today? (Mark all that apply)

**Physical Concerns**

- ☐ Pain
- ☐ Sleep
- ☐ Fatigue
- ☐ Tobacco use
- ☐ Substance use
- ☐ Memory or concentration
- ☐ Sexual health
- ☐ Changes in eating
- ☐ Loss or change of physical abilities

**Emotional Concerns**

- ☐ Worry or anxiety
- ☐ Sadness or depression
- ☐ Loss of interest or enjoyment
- ☐ Grief or loss
- ☐ Fear
- ☐ Loneliness
- ☐ Anger
- ☐ Changes in appearance
- ☐ Feelings of worthlessness or being a burden

**Social Concerns**

- ☐ Relationship with spouse or partner
- ☐ Relationship with children
- ☐ Relationship with family members
- ☐ Relationship with friends or coworkers
- ☐ Communication with health care team
- ☐ Ability to have children

**Practical Concerns**

- ☐ Taking care of myself
- ☐ Taking care of others
- ☐ Work
- ☐ School
- ☐ Housing
- ☐ Finances
- ☐ Insurance
- ☐ Transportation
- ☐ Child care
- ☐ Having enough food
- ☐ Access to medicine
- ☐ Treatment decisions

**Spiritual or Religious Concerns**

- ☐ Sense of meaning or purpose
- ☐ Changes in faith or beliefs
- ☐ Death, dying or afterlife
- ☐ Conflict between beliefs and cancer treatments
- ☐ Relationship with the sacred
- ☐ Ritual or dietary needs

**Other Concerns:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Note: All recommendations are category 2A unless otherwise indicated.  
Distress Thermometer: NCCN believes that the best management of any patient with cancer is to be a clinical trial. Participation in clinical trials is especially encouraged.

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DIS-A

NCCN, 2023

# PHQ-9

| Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?                                                                                       | Not at all | Several Days | More than half the days | Nearly every day |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|--------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| 1 Little interest or pleasure in doing things                                                                                                                            | 0          | 1            | 2                       | 3                |
| 2 Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless                                                                                                                                   | 0          | 1            | 2                       | 3                |
| 3 Trouble falling asleep or sleeping too much                                                                                                                            | 0          | 1            | 2                       | 3                |
| 4 Feeling tired or having little energy                                                                                                                                  | 0          | 1            | 2                       | 3                |
| 5 Poor appetite or overeating                                                                                                                                            | 0          | 1            | 2                       | 3                |
| 6 Feeling bad about yourself, or that you are a failure or have let yourself or family down                                                                              | 0          | 1            | 2                       | 3                |
| 7 Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television                                                                                  | 0          | 1            | 2                       | 3                |
| 8 Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed. Or the opposite—being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual | 0          | 1            | 2                       | 3                |
| 9 Thoughts that you would be better off dead, or of hurting yourself in some way                                                                                         | 0          | 1            | 2                       | 3                |
| <b>TOTAL SCORE (add the marked numbers):</b>                                                                                                                             |            |              |                         |                  |

- 9 Items
- Valid at 8 Items (1-8) or 2 Items (1-2)
- Available/validated in numerous languages
- Can be given once every two weeks

Degefa, et al., 2020; Indu, et al., 2018



## PHQ-9 Scoring and Interpretation

- Requires a 2 or 3 for either/both items 1 and 2
- Less than 5: No Symptoms
- 5 to 9: Minimal Symptoms
- 10 to 14: Moderate Symptoms
- 15 to 19: Moderately Severe Symptoms
- 20 to 27: Severe Symptoms

## GAD-7

| Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems? | Not at all | Several Days | More than half the days | Nearly every day |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|--------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| 1 Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge                                             | 0          | 1            | 2                       | 3                |
| 2 Not being able to stop or control worrying                                       | 0          | 1            | 2                       | 3                |
| 3 Worrying too much about different things                                         | 0          | 1            | 2                       | 3                |
| 4 Trouble relaxing                                                                 | 0          | 1            | 2                       | 3                |
| 5 Being so restless that it is hard to sit still                                   | 0          | 1            | 2                       | 3                |
| 6 Becoming easily annoyed or irritable                                             | 0          | 1            | 2                       | 3                |
| 7 Feeling afraid, as if something awful might happen                               | 0          | 1            | 2                       | 3                |
| <b>TOTAL SCORE (add the marked numbers):</b>                                       |            |              |                         |                  |

The GAD-7 was developed by Drs. Robert L. Spitzer, Janet B. W. Williams, Kurt Kroenke, and colleagues, with an education grant from Pfizer, Inc.

Spitzer, et al., 2006

- 7 Items
- Symptoms of Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Does not screen for other anxiety disorders
- Can be given once every two weeks



# GAD-7 Scoring and Interpretation

- Less than 5: Minimal Symptoms
- 5 to 9: Mild Symptoms
- 10 to 14: Moderate Symptoms
- 15 to 21: Severe Symptoms

# PCL-5

| PCL-5                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |            |          |          |           |         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|----------|----------|-----------|---------|
| Date (mm/dd/yyyy)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |            |          |          |           |         |
| Instructions: Below is a list of problems that people sometimes have in response to a very stressful experience. Please read each problem carefully, and then circle one of the numbers in the right to indicate how much the problem bothered you in the previous 14 days. |            |          |          |           |         |
| In the past week, how much have you bothered by:                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |            |          |          |           |         |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Not at all | A little | Moderate | Very much | Country |
| 1. Repeatedly thinking about the stressful experience?                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 0          | 1        | 2        | 3         | 4       |
| 2. Repeatedly thinking about the stressful experience?                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 0          | 1        | 2        | 3         | 4       |
| 3. Repeatedly thinking about the stressful experience?                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 0          | 1        | 2        | 3         | 4       |
| 4. Repeatedly thinking about the stressful experience?                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 0          | 1        | 2        | 3         | 4       |
| 5. Repeatedly thinking about the stressful experience?                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 0          | 1        | 2        | 3         | 4       |
| 6. Repeatedly thinking about the stressful experience?                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 0          | 1        | 2        | 3         | 4       |
| 7. Repeatedly thinking about the stressful experience?                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 0          | 1        | 2        | 3         | 4       |
| 8. Repeatedly thinking about the stressful experience?                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 0          | 1        | 2        | 3         | 4       |
| 9. Repeatedly thinking about the stressful experience?                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 0          | 1        | 2        | 3         | 4       |
| 10. Repeatedly thinking about the stressful experience?                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 0          | 1        | 2        | 3         | 4       |
| 11. Repeatedly thinking about the stressful experience?                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 0          | 1        | 2        | 3         | 4       |
| 12. Repeatedly thinking about the stressful experience?                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 0          | 1        | 2        | 3         | 4       |
| 13. Repeatedly thinking about the stressful experience?                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 0          | 1        | 2        | 3         | 4       |
| 14. Repeatedly thinking about the stressful experience?                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 0          | 1        | 2        | 3         | 4       |
| 15. Repeatedly thinking about the stressful experience?                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 0          | 1        | 2        | 3         | 4       |
| 16. Repeatedly thinking about the stressful experience?                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 0          | 1        | 2        | 3         | 4       |
| 17. Repeatedly thinking about the stressful experience?                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 0          | 1        | 2        | 3         | 4       |
| 18. Repeatedly thinking about the stressful experience?                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 0          | 1        | 2        | 3         | 4       |
| 19. Repeatedly thinking about the stressful experience?                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 0          | 1        | 2        | 3         | 4       |
| 20. Repeatedly thinking about the stressful experience?                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 0          | 1        | 2        | 3         | 4       |

- 20 Items
- Corresponds to DSM-5 criteria for PTSD
- More involved to score/interpret
- Can be given weekly

Bovin, et al., 2016; Ferrie, et al., 2023



## Sub-threshold / Non-Pathological Symptoms

- The symptoms cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.
- The episode is not attributed to the physiological effects of a substance or another medical condition.

## Behavioral Health Interventions



## Medication

- Citalopram (Celexa) and Escitalopram (Lexapro) are generally considered first-line SSRIs
  - Few drug interactions
  - Relatively mild side effect profile
  - Can be used without complication in patients taking Tamoxifen
- Venlafaxine (Effexor) and Duloxetine (Cymbalta) are considered first-line SNRIs
  - Venlafaxine is appropriate for patients taking Tamoxifen
  - Duloxetine should be avoided in patients with excessive alcohol use or chronic liver disease

Wakefield, 2022

## Medication (continued)

- Trazodone (Oleptro) can be used for patients experiencing pain and insomnia as well as symptoms of depression.
- Mirtazapine (Remeron) can be used for patients with poor sleep and poor appetite as well as symptoms of depression.
- Bupropion (Wellbutrin/Zyban) can be used to help smokers quit but does carry an increased risk of seizures in some patients.
- The research on the use of Esketamine (Ketamine) for chronic depression and suicide ideation is ongoing and growing.

Wakefield, 2022



## Behavioral Health Interventions

- Range from brief interventions to moderate- or long-term therapy.
- Can involve many parts of an integrated medicine team.
- Mindfulness and relaxation are strong interventions that do not require psychologists/therapists.
- Exercise, even low-impact exercise can have a positive impact on a patient's mood and wellbeing.
- Can also include specialized treatments such as Reiki and Acupuncture (but research is not conclusive).

Lu, et al., 2008; Misiag, et al., 2022; Seluzicki, Corcoran, & Mao, 2019

## Therapy

- Can take many forms
  - Acceptance and Commitment Therapy
  - Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
  - Constructive Therapy
  - Meaning-Focused Psychotherapy
  - Mindfulness Therapy
  - Psychodynamic Therapy
  - Supportive Therapy
- Can last for various lengths
  - Long-term therapy (30 to 60 sessions over 4 to 15 months)
  - Short-term therapy (12 to 16 sessions over 2 to 4 months)

Bugatti, et al., 2023A; Bugatti, et al., 2023B; Newell & Sanson-Fisher, 2002



## Therapy (continued)

- Therapy should be targeted to specific goals.
- The method of therapy is less important than the patients' preferences for therapy method and therapist.
- Individual and group therapy have been shown to be effective.
- Support groups vs. group therapy
- Meaning-focused therapy has been shown to be very effective for breast cancer patients.

Mulligan & Kanas, 2016; Saunders, 2000; Van der Speck, et al., 2014

## Meaning-Centered Psychotherapy

- Based on the work of Victor Frankl
- Attempts to create meaning through:
  - The individual's choice of attitudes to challenging life circumstances.
  - The individual's ability to connect with life through art, humor, nature, love, and relationships.
  - The individual's engagement with life through work, hobbies, and other activities.
  - The individual's understanding of their past, present, and future legacy.
- 8 group sessions / 7 individual sessions

Montross Thomas, Meier, & Irwin, 2014

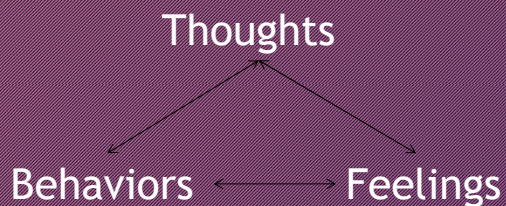


## Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

- ACT focuses on identifying the patient's personal values and developing strategies for living a values-consistent lifestyle.
- Effective in patients with many forms of cancer, particularly those with the presence of chronic pain.
- Emphasizes flexibility, adjustment, and acceptance of the aspects of life that cannot be changed.
- In cancer patients, ACT can reduce anxiety, depression, and improve quality of life.

Mathew, et al., 2021

## Cognitive Behavioral Therapy



- Based on the idea that if we can change how we act and/or think, we can change how we feel.
- Can be effective with short protocols.
- Widely researched and widely used across the US and the globe.

Daniels, 2015, Zhang, et al., 2022



## Cognitive Distortions

- Overgeneralization  
“Now that I have breast cancer, all of my children are doomed to have cancer.”
- Disqualifying the Positive  
“My cancer is responding to treatment, but I am still marked for life.”
- Jumping to Conclusions  
“No matter how good I feel, this cancer is going to kill me.”
- Catastrophizing  
“My scars make me so hideous, I’ll never be attractive to my husband.”

Antoni, 2003

## Self-Compassion

- In cancer patients, self-compassion is consistently related to better psychological outcomes.
- Greater self-compassion at the time of diagnosis is associated with less symptoms of depression, anxiety, and fatigue at both the beginning and the end of medical treatment for cancer.

Zhu, et al., 2019



## CBT Protocols: Depression

- Session 1: Initial Evaluation
- Session 2: Understanding Depression
- Session 3: Mastering Behavioral Symptoms
- Session 4: Taking Action on Procrastination
- Session 5: Mastering Feeling Symptoms
- Session 6: Challenging Negative Thoughts
- Session 7: Dropping Thoughts
- Session 8: Correcting Faulty Beliefs
- Session 9: Preparing for Therapy Completion
- Session 10: Final Session

Targeting Behavioral  
Symptoms

Targeting Cognitive  
Symptoms

## CBT Protocol: Anxiety and Worry

- Session 1: The Nature of Generalized Anxiety
- Session 2: Learning to Recognize Your Own Anxiety
- Session 3: The Purpose and Function of Anxiety
- Session 4: A Closer Look at Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Session 5: Learning to Relax
- Session 6: Controlling Thoughts: Overestimating Risk
- Session 7: Controlling Thoughts: Thinking the Worst
- Session 8: Facing Your Fears
- Session 9: From Fears to Behaviors
- Session 10: Time Management, Goal-Setting, and Problem-Solving
- Session 11: Drugs for Anxiety
- Session 12: Your Accomplishments and Your Future

Targeting Cognitive  
Symptoms

Targeting Behavioral  
Symptoms



## Other Behavioral Health Interventions: Exercise

- Aerobic exercise associated with improved quality of life, decreased fatigue, and reduces the impact of treatment-related side effects.
- Correlates with improved survival rates/decreased mortality.
- Exercise should be conducted within limits imposed by physical limitations from cancer treatment or other comorbid conditions.
- Twice weekly 60-minute exercise sessions significantly reduced anxiety and depressed mood.

Misiag, et al., 2022

## Other Behavioral Health Interventions: Yoga



Cramer, et al., 2017

- Improves quality of life
- Reduces fatigue
- Improves quality of sleep
- Less depression and anxiety than those that did not engage in comparable exercise.



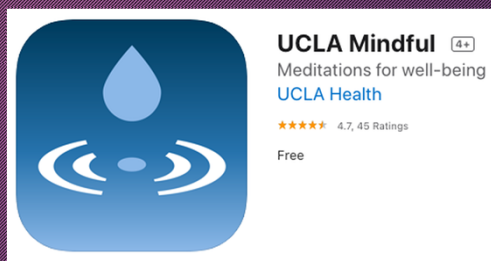
## Other Behavioral Health Interventions: Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

- “Mindfulness is awareness of one’s internal states and surroundings.”
- Is used in many psychosocial interventions and in a dedicated treatment format: Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction (MBSR).
- MBSR was found to reduce fatigue, anxiety, and cognitive side effects of treatment in breast cancer patients.

APA, 2023; Del Castanhel & Liberali, 2018

## UCLA Mindful App

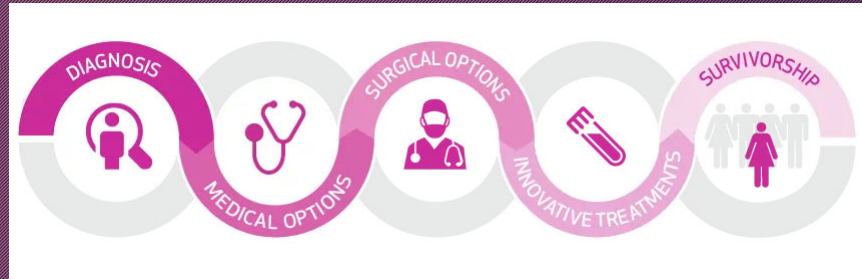
- Mobile apps have been found as effective tools to help deliver mindfulness-based interventions.
- The UCLA Mindful App has a strong scientific basis.
- However, much of the research for the specific app is still ongoing.



Bégin, et al., 2022; UCLA Health, 2023



## So Where Does Behavioral Health Fit In?



What can I do?





## Here's what you can do:

- Destigmatize mental health/behavioral health care.
- Try to answer questions about what treatment may look like or could involve.
- Refer the patient to appropriate care providers.
- Encourage exercise and mindfulness.
- Challenge their negative automatic thoughts.
- Encourage self-compassion.



“Watch out for each other. Love everyone and forgive everyone, including yourself. Forgive your anger. Forgive your guilt. Your shame. Your sadness. Embrace and open up your love, your joy, your truth, and most especially your heart.”



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