A vertical graphic for Breast Cancer Awareness. The background is a close-up of blue, weathered wooden planks. In the center, two hands are painted a vibrant pink, with the fingers interlaced to form a heart shape. A dark teal rectangular box is positioned in the upper left quadrant, containing the text 'Breast Cancer Awareness' in white. At the bottom, a white rectangular box contains the text 'THE NESHOPA DEMOCRAT' in black, serif, all-caps font.

Breast Cancer  
Awareness

**THE NESHOPA DEMOCRAT**

# Cancer survivors stress need for annual cancer screening tests

By STEVE SWOGETINSKY  
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Each year, Cheryl Wilkerson faithfully reports for her appointment to have her mammogram.

She believes the yearly check for breast cancer can save your life. And in 2017, it saved her life.

"I went for my mammogram because I am over 40 and I always go," Wilkerson said. "And I encourage everyone to go."

Usually, it is a routine procedure but that time it was not.

"There was a spot behind my breast," Wilkerson said. "They went in and took two lymph nodes out. They had to get the radiologist to check it and sure enough, it came back cancer. My worst nightmare. We were fixing to go on a cruise. They told me don't let this worry you. Go on and enjoy your cruise. But how do you not worry about something like this?"

She and her husband, Jerry Wilkerson returned home from vacation and she had the surgery.

"I was in the early stage, thank goodness for my mammogram," Wilkerson said. "They did the surgery and told me I was going to have to take 35 rounds of radiation."

The radiation took a toll on her body but she stayed with it, even when the doctors suggested she take a break.

"By the 18th treatment, I was burnt solid," Wilkerson said. "We made a book, recording how it looked every day. They (the radiation staff) said, 'You can't do it today.' I said just go on and get it over with."

"The last four treatments I had to take were called booster shots, where they do it twice. I said go on, I can handle it. All my skin came off. I had blisters on top of blisters."

Cheryl and Jerry both work at the Neshoba County Gin Association. She said she tried to work during that time and will always appreciate the support she received.

"My boss said, 'I will work with you any way I can,'" Cheryl said. "He would even tell me, you are hurting, go on home. He knew I was hurting."

She got through the treatments but it certainly wasn't easy.

"I cried at night because I was hurting so bad," Cheryl said. "There was nothing I could do but keep on going."



Cheryl and Jerry Wilkerson

After the radiation treatment was over, the doctors decided she didn't need to take chemotherapy but she has to take medicine for five years. This has been hard, too.

"They have had to change me three different times to the sister pills because of the side effects," Cheryl said. "I have hot flashes at times, and I get cold sometimes. I have to sleep with an electric blanket on, even in the summertime because I have chills. I get up to go from the couch and go to my bedroom, I am freezing. My feet are like ice."

Then 10 minutes, later I am kicking the cover off."

But the good news was that Cheryl was cancer-free. However, cancer was not finished with the Wilkerson family.

"I felt like I could breathe a little bit," Cheryl said as she remembered leaving her doctor's office. "Then we stopped at the Shell station to gas up when we got a call from Jerry's doctor."

The results from Jerry's PSI test came back high and he was diagnosed with

aggressive prostate cancer.

"Here we go again," Cheryl said. "So, 2017 was a bad year for me and 2018 was a bad year for him. We have both been there for each other. We both knew what each other was going through."

In March 2018, as he awaited surgery to remove the cancerous part of his colon, they learned his colon had died and his organs had started shutting down.

"They had sent us to Jackson," Cheryl remembered. "We got there and the doctor said, 'Mr. Wilkerson, the bad news is that you only have two hours to live.' He had all of his nurses and doctors helping join hands and pray for Jerry. There was the most calming feeling that came into that room. Then they did surgery and Jerry pulled through."

"The doctor later asked Jerry what he was thinking when he told him that, and Jerry said he wasn't worried. He knew he would be OK," Cheryl said.

Jerry had to wear a colostomy bag for several months. Then in July, he went back to surgery and no longer had to use the colostomy bag. In September 2018, another surgery removed all the cancerous parts of his colon and he too, has been cancer-free.

"I'm doing OK," Jerry said. "Not the best but OK."

Cheryl continues to stress how important regular cancer screenings are.

"The tests can save your life," she emphasized. "I just can't say that enough."

Both are lifetime Neshoba County residents. Cheryl is from the House Community and Jerry is from Bloomo. They were friends in high school and graduated from Neshoba Central in 1975. They went their separate ways.

Then they met again at their 35th high school reunion.

"Everybody kept telling me, Cheryl that's who you need," Cheryl said. "I was single at the time and said I don't need anyone. He said, 'I will walk you out,' and he kissed me on the cheek."

"I called him the next day. We dated for three years. He was still in seminary in New Orleans. His mom said, 'Some girl called you.' His mom and my mom worked together," Cheryl said. "Now we have been married 13 years this September."

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# Reduce Breast Cancer Risks

Women with certain risk factors are more likely than others to develop breast cancer, according to the National Breast Cancer organization.

Some women have an increased risk based on family heritage. There are other risk factors that can be controlled, according to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation.

### Get to know the risk factors

Except for skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common cancer in women in the U.S. It can be treated successfully.

A few risks of getting breast cancer include:

Being a woman. Simply being a woman, is the biggest risk factor for developing breast cancer.

Age. Just like many other diseases, the risk of one getting it increases as one gets older.

Family history. If you've had one first-degree female relative (sister, mother, daughter) diagnosed with breast cancer, your risk is doubled. Understanding your history is key to beating breast cancer.



### Prevention Strategies

Lifestyle habits that can help reduce your risk of breast cancer include:

Maintain a healthy weight. According to the National Cancer Institute, being

overweight or obese after menopause increases a woman's risk of breast cancer and can worsen outcomes after a diagnosis. Putting on a lot of extra pounds in the early stages of adulthood can nearly double your chance of developing breast can-

cer after menopause. But if you're able to avoid gaining weight, your risk is cut in half.

Eat less red meat. High consumption of red meat is related to a greater risk of developing breast and other cancers. Aim to consume more plant-based sources of protein, such as beans, nuts, and quinoa.

Eat more fruit and vegetables. Lower intake of fruits and vegetables is associated with breast cancer, particularly estrogen receptor (ER)-negative breast cancer. The USDA dietary guidelines recommend consuming two cups of fruit and two-and-a-half cups of vegetables each day.

Limit alcohol. Even moderate alcohol consumption is associated with a higher risk of breast cancer. Women who have between two and three alcoholic drinks per day have a 20% higher risk of the disease compared to those who do not drink.

Quit smoking. Several studies have demonstrated a link between smoking and an increased risk of developing breast cancer.

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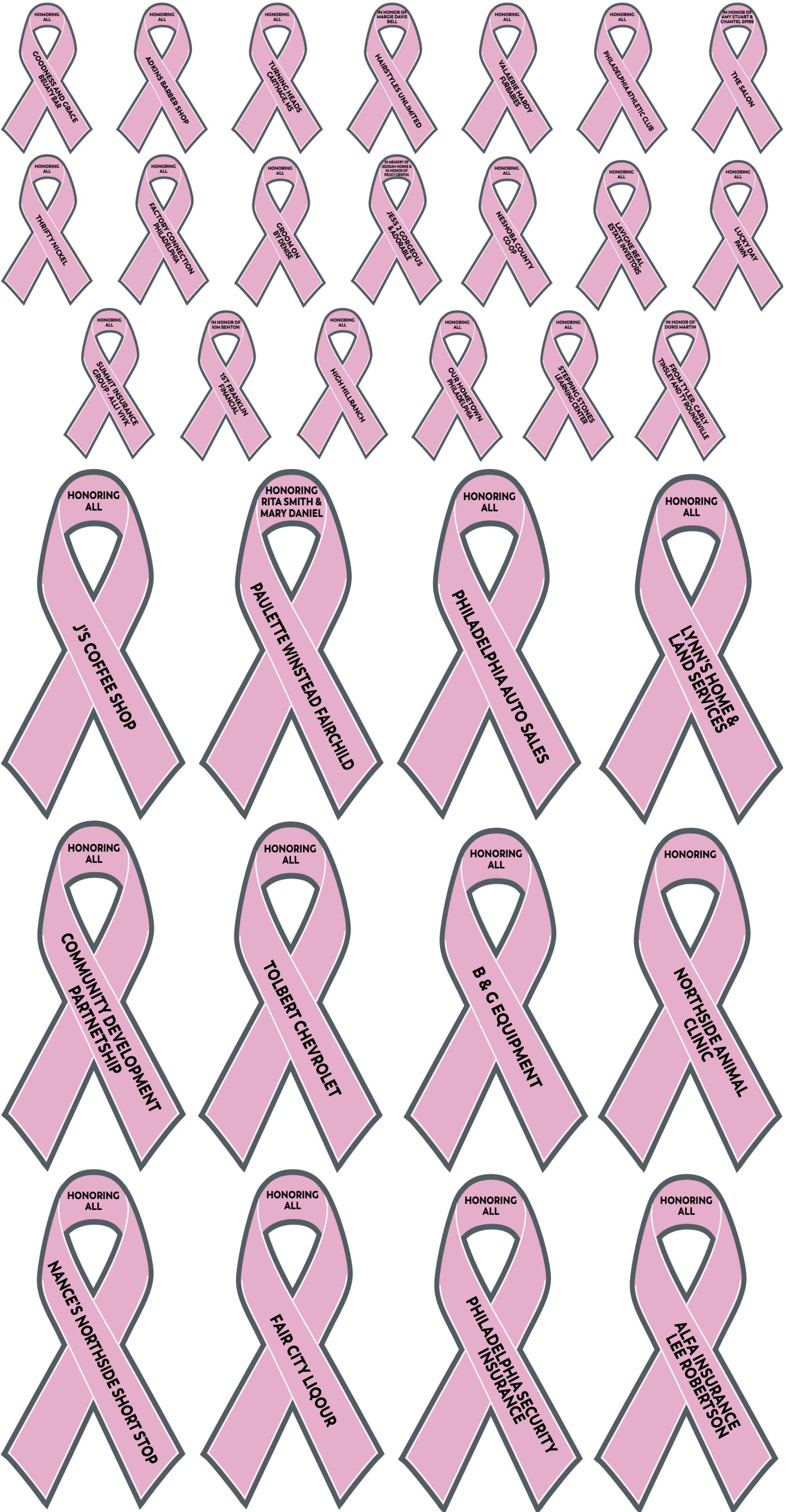
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# Support Groups and Healing

Cancer support groups are meetings for people with cancer and anyone touched by the disease, including family members.

The benefits can be many. The top reason people join support groups, even those who have a good family support infrastructure, is to be with others who have had similar cancer experiences. Research shows that joining a support group improves both quality of life and survival, according to the National Cancer Institute.

## TYPES OF SUPPORT GROUPS

Some groups focus on all kinds of cancer, while others are focused on one kind, such as a group for women with breast cancer, according to NCI. Some can be open to everyone or just for people of a certain age, sex, culture or religion.

Children and family members of patients also can benefit from support groups that focus on family concerns, relationship changes, financial worries and how to support the person with cancer. Some groups include both survivors and family members.

Online support groups take place through chat rooms, webinars, social media or moderated discussion groups.



Online groups offer flexibility to participants and are a resource for people who live in rural areas where an in-person group might not be available.

Some support groups are conducted by conference call, bringing together people from all over the country who have

been touched by cancer.

Here are some benefits of support groups, according to the NCI. They can:

- Help you feel better, more hopeful, and not so alone.
- Give you a chance to talk about your feelings and work through them.

- Help you deal with practical problems, such as problems at work or school.
- Help you cope with side effects of treatment.

## WHERE TO FIND A SUPPORT GROUP

The NCI recommends

reaching out to the following sources in your community and online for support groups:

- Your local hospital.
- Your social worker.
- Other patients who have tried support groups.
- An online search for groups.

# Personalized Survivorship Care

People are living longer after being diagnosed with breast cancer and need personalized survivorship care plans to meet their differing needs, according to a Dutch study, presented in May 2021.

## WHAT ARE SURVIVORSHIP CARE PLANS?

Medical professionals and scientists estimate that there are about 3.8 million breast cancer survivors in the U.S. with the number expected to increase substantially, according to BreastCancer.org.

Yet, because of treatments, many breast cancer survivors are at a higher risk of developing other diseases as they age, including high blood pressure, heart disease and osteoporosis.

Survivorship care plans are written documents made up of two parts. One is a record of treatments the patient has received. The second part is a roadmap of what you can expect in the years after treatment, including any late or long-term side-effects and a schedule of how you'll be monitored for these side-effects and other health conditions, according to BreastCancer.org.

To make it easier for you and your doctors to develop a sur-



ivorship care plan, professional organizations such as the American Society of Clinical Oncology have developed templates you can use as a starting point.

## WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PATIENTS

Ask your oncologist about a

survivorship care plan.

Here are some questions you may want to ask your oncologist, according to BreastCancer.org:

- Ask for a survivorship care plan in writing that explains all the medical issues you need to consider and lists which screening tests you

need and when you should have them.

- Ask which doctor you should see for each medical issue.
- If your oncologist recommends that you see a specialist — a cardiologist for example — and you've never seen one before, you may want to

ask for a referral to a specific doctor.

- If there is anything in your survivorship care plan that you don't understand, ask your doctor or nurse to explain it.

It's also important to coordinate the plan with your primary care doctor.

BREAST CANCER AWARENESS | NATURAL TREATMENTS

# Exercise and Mindfulness Training

A combination of exercise and mindfulness training appear to better alleviate fatigue in breast cancer survivors than either technique alone, according to new research.

**Fatigue and breast cancer treatment**

As many of 90% of breast cancer patients must deal with fatigue, as it is the most common side-effect of treatment, according to BreastCancer.org. Some doctors estimate that nine out of 10 people have some fatigue during treatment. Even

rest can be ineffective in curbing fatigue, and it can last for months after treatment.

**About the study**

Few studies have examined the combination of exercise and mindfulness or relaxation training to ease fatigue. A new study published by the journal Psycho-Oncology divided women into three groups: aerobic exercise-only, relaxation-only and a combination group.

“Over the course of the week, the groups that took part in a combination of

exercise and mindfulness training reported a drop in fatigue levels from moderate to mild. The other groups did not show a comparable degree of improvement,” said Jason Cohen, a former graduate student in the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Exercise, Technology, and Cognition Laboratory, in a statement.

**What this means for patients**

If you’re having fatigue from breast cancer treatment, ask your doctor about

combining exercise and mindfulness training. Research shows that exercise can reduce the risk of breast cancer recurrence. Ask your doctor how much and how often you can exercise, as well as if there are types of exercise you should avoid, suggests BreastCancer.org.

Check for group exercise classes for cancer patients in your area. Exercising with others can help keep you motivated. You can look for online videos or courses to get started.



BREAST CANCER AWARENESS | HOW YOU CAN HELP

## Spread Awareness

If you have been personally affected by breast cancer or have a friend or family member who has been affected, you may be looking for ways to help spread awareness and support breast cancer patients.

Here are some ideas from the National Breast Cancer Foundation and the National Foundation for Cancer Research.

1. Share your story of how breast cancer has impacted you on the National Breast Cancer Foundation’s website. During the month of October, the organization will share stories on their website as a “celebration of strength and a message of support to those currently on their own breast cancer journey.” Visit <https://bit.ly/3lT2HVH> to share.

2. Make a one-time or monthly donation to help a woman in need get screening or access to treatment. Visit <https://bit.ly/3AyJEnL> to donate.

3. Spread the word on your social media channels. Link to your favorite breast cancer research or aid organization.

You could also consider hosting a virtual fundraiser or a Facebook fundraiser.

4. Proudly wear a pink ribbon during October or year-round. It creates a conversation starter to help you share your story.

5. Alternatively to wearing a pink ribbon, participate in Breast Cancer Now’s Wear it Pink Day. On October 22, 2021, wear a pink outfit and coordinate with friends to help spread awareness. You can also host a fundraiser on the day.

5. Breast cancer patients may not always ask for help when they need it. Go out of your way to offer help proactively. Say something like, “Could I come over and walk the dog every afternoon next week?” or “Can I bring dinner for the family on your upcoming treatment days?”

6. Many chemo wards take donations of clothing, scarves and hats for patients. Reach out to local organizations to see what good or services they could use.

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(Left) Mammography Supervisor Aarah Sharp RT(R),(M)  
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