



Strength After Breast Cancer (SABC)

Virtua's Strength After Breast Cancer Program (SABC) was developed at The University of Pennsylvania and based on the Physical Activity and Lymphedema Trial called PAL. Patients enrolled in the SABC program have an opportunity to work with a team of cancer-certified fitness trainers at Virtua's Centers for HealthFitness, as well as certified lymphedema therapists.

The goal of Virtua's Strength After Breast Cancer program is to provide our patients with education regarding side effects of breast cancer treatment and ways to identify these side effects. With early intervention, increased awareness, and exercise, you can take a proactive approach towards healing.

Functional Status

During your cancer journey, you may have to undergo various forms of treatment designed to destroy cancer cells. Although lifesaving, these medical interventions can often result in side effects that impact your daily level of function.

Some common questions asked are:

- What are the side effects?
- How often do they occur?
- When are they likely to occur?

For lymphedema, we will further discuss:

- How to identify subclinical lymphedema symptoms
- How to reduce your risk of getting lymphedema
- The best way to manage and treat your stage of lymphedema

As you go through this educational section we will help you identify these side effects, seek appropriate treatment, and support you as you reestablish an independent level of functioning.

Upper Body Symptoms

After surgery, chemotherapy and/or radiation, you may experience some upper body symptoms. These can include:

- Difficulty moving your arm, shoulder or trunk due to tightness at or around your incision.
- **Axillary cording** which can occur when lymphatic vessels get stuck in healing scar tissue and form tight guitar string like cords that limit arm movement.
- Numbness, tingling, burning or other sensations in your arm, shoulder, and/or trunk
- Mild swelling as your body is healing from the surgery or radiation therapy
- Weakness in your arm, shoulder, and/or trunk

Lymphedema

Who is at risk for developing lymphedema?

Any patient that has had the following:

- Removal of lymph nodes under the arm or breast area
- Radiation localized to under the arm or breast area



- Infections and seromas after surgery
- Necessary disruption to lymphatic tissue
- Patients who are overweight

What is lymphedema?

- Lymphedema is an abnormal accumulation of protein-rich fluid in the tissue which can result in swelling of a body part.
- It only impacts the region of the body affected by lymph node removal/damage. For example, upper body lymphedema can occur on the specific side of the body that had lymph nodes removed.

Why is the lymphatic system important?

- In conjunction with the liver, the lymphatic system removes and filters debris and foreign material from your body (e.g. bacteria, viruses, cancer cells).
- It balances fluid and proteins in the circulatory system by transporting approximately 2 liters of lymph fluid per day.
- It helps protect the body from infection.

Symptoms of lymphedema

Symptoms may present gradually or have sudden onset following trauma to the involved side of the body. This sudden onset can include limb swelling, redness, heaviness, or tightness on the affected side and can be brought on by infection, burns, or other acute injuries. Onset of lymphedema may occur soon after cancer treatment, or many years later due to injury or age related

decline. For this reason, it is important to be aware of any sub clinical symptoms you may experience. These symptoms on the affected side may include:

- Numbness
- Tingling
- Aching
- Fatigue
- Heaviness
- Tenderness in the elbow
- “Pain of congestion” - full feeling

How to reduce your risk of developing lymphedema:

- Seek medical check-ups for surveillance & reporting changes
- Monitor and take care of your skin on the affected side
- Practice a healthy lifestyle including exercise and appropriate nutrition to maintain proper body weight
- Avoid extremes in temperature
- Avoid limb constriction from jewelry or tight clothing
- Treat arm infections promptly & avoid trauma
- Avoid manicures

How to treat lymphedema

Lymphedema should be evaluated and treated by a Certified Lymphedema Therapist. Based on the severity or stage of



your lymphedema your therapist will come up with an appropriate plan that may include the following:

- Monitor the size of your extremity by taking arm measurements.
- Provide you with manual lymphatic drainage to help facilitate better lymphatic flow.
- Provide you with arm bandaging to help reduce arm swelling.
- Help you choose the right kind of compression garment.
- Educate you to be an active participant in the long term management of your lymphedema.
- Help you choose the right type of fitness program that can decrease your risk of a lymphedema flare-up.

Muscle Aches and Neuropathy

Experiencing muscle aches and nerve pain at various times during or after your surgery/treatment is expected. There are several factors that can influence these symptoms:

- Post-surgical healing
- Pain related to chemotherapy
- Pain related to radiation

Following surgery you may experience stiffness and general aches related directly to your body's automatic response to guard and protect your surgical incisions. Over time this posturing as well as self-limitations in movement can cause pain and soreness.

Pain and other symptoms related to chemotherapy and radiation are dependent upon type, dose, duration, and the schedule of your treatment. These may include:

- Joint aches
- Muscle spasms
- Tingling
- Numbness
- Sensation as if you are wearing gloves or socks
- Skin damage

Bone Health

Certain types of chemotherapy may cause deficiencies in bone health. These include partial estrogen agonist and aromatase inhibitors.

These types of therapies combined with other risk factors including inactivity, use of corticosteroids and inadequate intake of calcium and vitamin D can contribute to decreased bone density.

Heart Effects

Personal behavioral risks as well as exposure to some forms of chemotherapy/radiation may increase risk of developing heart disease. Risk factors include: age, body mass index, diet, physical activity levels, smoking, and elevated cholesterol and blood lipids.



Weight Gain

It is common to experience weight gain during your cancer treatment. The extent of change in body weight is influenced by:

- Treatment type
- Menopausal or pre-menopausal status at diagnosis
- Activity level
- Nutrition

Exercise and proper nutrition are an important part of your overall health and journey towards healing.

- Recommendations for appropriate follow up care
- Entry into the SABC fitness program which includes:
 - A fitness assessment and program designed by cancer-certified fitness trainers
 - Follow up screenings with a Certified Lymphedema Therapist
 - Physical or occupational therapy evaluation and treatment
 - Follow up with your physician
 - Further education for prevention and self-care

Fatigue

During treatment for breast cancer, the level and duration of fatigue can vary. Studies show that exercise programs specifically aerobic exercise, is the number one recommended non pharmacologic treatment for cancer related fatigue.

How do I get started with the Strength After Breast Cancer Program?

Now that you have read the educational section, and completed your cancer treatment, you are eligible for the SABC free screening.

What will you gain from the free SABC screening?

- An assessment by a Certified Lymphedema Therapist

For entry into the Strength After Breast Cancer program (beginning with a free screening by a Certified Lymphedema Therapist) please call the Virtua Access Center:

855-847-8821

Be sure to tell the navigator that you have read the strength after breast cancer educational material and you would like to schedule a free Strength After Breast Cancer Screening at Virtua in Motion.