

# Activities of Daily Living in Women With Advanced Breast Cancer

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**Purpose/Objectives:** To detail the daily activities of women with advanced breast cancer.

**Design:** Descriptive, qualitative.

**Setting:** Six clinical sites in New England. Of the six sites, three were urban, one was suburban, and two were rural, with three sites being comprehensive cancer centers.

**Sample:** 84 women with a confirmed diagnosis of stage IV breast cancer with a life expectancy of four months or more.

**Methods:** A secondary analysis of an expressive writing intervention study control group. As part of the control writing group, participants kept handwritten activity logs for four consecutive days. Standard content analysis procedures were used to analyze the transcribed activity logs.

**Main Research Variables:** Activities of daily living in women with advanced breast cancer.

**Findings:** 22 codes were identified that depicted the daily activities of participants. Subsequent analysis merged the 22 codes into six themes.

**Conclusions:** Findings demonstrated that patients with advanced breast cancer are living very full, active lives despite numerous symptoms and cancer treatments.

**Implications for Nursing:** The study serves as a foundation for the development of interventions to enhance daily functioning. Oncology nurses should counsel women with advanced cancer regarding pacing and self-care activities.

## Key Points . . .

- ▶ Women with advanced-stage breast cancer carry out usual family and professional roles while coping with physical challenges and cancer treatments.
- ▶ Napping and activity pacing are essential to the daily lives of patients with metastatic breast cancer to manage pervasive fatigue.
- ▶ Nurses can help women with advanced breast cancer maintain healthy and balanced lives through self-care and activity pacing education, counseling, and coaching.

et al., 2005) and focused on symptom-related changes (Gua-landi et al., 2003) and care activities and interventions aimed at improving women's quality of life (QOL) (Fowler, Rodney, Roberts, & Broadus, 2005; Golant, Altman, & Martin, 2003; Helgeson & Tomich, 2005). However, qualitative research that explores the extent to which women with metastatic breast cancer are able to carry out their daily activities is lacking. The current study was designed to describe, in detail, the daily activities of women with advanced breast cancer. Content analysis of activity logs completed for four consecutive days provided insight into the breadth of activities performed by women living with advanced-stage breast cancer.

## Literature Review

Although an extensive amount of cancer research is dedicated to the psychological, social, and physical sequelae of breast cancer, research that specifically focuses on the effect of metastatic breast cancer on women's daily activities is limited. The majority of research has been quantitative, focusing on activities of daily living or functional status at a specific time point (i.e., diagnosis, treatment, or post-treatment or survivorship). Changes in functional status or daily activities after receiving the diagnosis of cancer (Kroenke et al., 2004), after initial treatment for cancer (Given, Given, & Azzouz, 2001), during

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**B**reast cancer is the most common cancer among women, with the exception of nonmelanoma skin cancers. An estimated 178,480 new cases of invasive breast cancer will be diagnosed in women in the United States in 2007 (American Cancer Society, 2007). The National Cancer Institute estimated that approximately 2.3 million women with a history of breast cancer were alive in January 2002 (Ries et al., 2007). Although some of the women no longer had cancer, many had evidence of advanced disease and continued to actively undergo treatments. The diagnosis of breast cancer, its symptoms, and, consequently, the side effects of treatments create multiple physical and psychological challenges and can have devastating effects on women's everyday lives (Ahlberg, Ekman, & Gaston-Johansson, 2005; Bourjolly, Kerson, & Nuamah, 1999; Kroenke et al., 2004). Many patients with breast cancer report changes in their physical activities, including basic self-care and engagement in work and leisure, during cancer treatment and in its aftermath (Ganz et al., 2003; Hann et al., 1999; Kroenke et al.). For some, post-treatment daily activities gradually return to pretreatment levels; however, others may not fully participate in life activities for many years (Flechtner & Bottomley, 2003) and, in some cases, may not regain a precancer level of activities (Ganz et al., 2003).

Prior research using quantitative methods has measured changes in activity levels of women with metastatic breast cancer (Hodgson & Given, 2004; Kroenke et al., 2004; Scheier