

STRIDE Workbook

Session 1

In this session, we will:

- ❖ Get to know each other
- ❖ Understand your reasons for taking hormonal therapy
- ❖ Explore reasons you may not want to take hormonal therapy
- ❖ Learn skills to relax by breathing with your diaphragm

Understanding your Medication and Belly Breathing

Tell Us About Yourself

As we start our first session, take a moment to think about the following questions:

- ❖ What hormonal therapy are you taking?
- ❖ How long have you been on your hormonal therapy?
- ❖ Why do you want to participate in this program?
- ❖ What do you hope to gain from this program?

Feel free to write down any thoughts below:

If you feel comfortable, share your answers with the group. As a reminder, we ask that everything that is shared in the group to stay within the group, so all can share freely.

To start, we will discuss your medication and what it does for you.

Why did my doctor prescribe this medication?

Hormones in the body, specifically *estrogen* and *progesterone*, are very important for reproductive development and other cell growth. However, these hormones can also promote the growth of some breast cancer cells.

How?

- ❖ Certain breast tumors have hormone receptors that become active when they come in contact with these hormones.
- ❖ When the hormones come in contact with these tumors and activate the receptors, it starts the growth of cancer cells.
- ❖ A tumor that has hormone receptors is called hormone sensitive; a tumor with receptors for estrogen is called estrogen receptor-positive.

For a tumor that is estrogen or progesterone receptor-positive, depriving the tumor of the hormone will slow or stop the growth of breast cancer cells. Hormonal therapy slows or stops the growth of hormone-sensitive tumors by either blocking the body's ability to make the hormone (e.g., anastrozole), or by interfering with the effects of hormones on breast cancer cells (e.g., tamoxifen).

Hormonal therapy may also be called hormone therapy or endocrine therapy.

- ❖ This therapy is often given in the adjuvant setting, meaning that it is given after primary treatment (i.e., surgery, chemotherapy, and/or radiation), and called adjuvant hormonal therapy or adjuvant endocrine therapy.
- ❖ Research shows that women with hormone sensitive tumors who receive at least 5 years of adjuvant hormonal therapy have a large reduction in risk of breast cancer recurrence and lower chance of developing a new breast cancer in the other breast. Because of this reduced risk, it is very important to take this medication every day.

Exercise 1.1: What is your reason for taking your hormonal therapy?

Check any that apply to you.

I am taking this medication because:

- It will prevent me from having a recurrence of breast cancer
- It is easy to take
- I trust my oncologist and/or nurse practitioner and their recommended treatment plan
- I read that it would be helpful
- It is giving me the reassurance that I need to prevent breast cancer from coming back
- It is part of my daily routine
- My oncologist told me to take it
- It gives me some control over my health
- Other: _____

Exercise 1.2: Do you have any concerns about taking your hormonal therapy?
Check any that apply to you.

I am concerned about taking this medication because:

- The side effects are a lot to manage
- I sometimes forget to take it
- I am concerned that the medication may cause other health problems
- I wonder whether the medication is working
- I don't like the affect it has on my mood
- I feel like it is not worth the side effects
- Taking it reminds me that I had breast cancer
- I worry about taking too much medication
- The side effects negatively affect my quality of life
- The cost of the medication is high
- Sometimes I purposefully skip doses
- I am unsure if the side effects are from the medication or are unrelated
- I don't like taking medication
- I don't like that I must be on it for so many years
- I worry about how it affects my ability to get pregnant
- I'm healthy and don't think I should have to take this medication
- Sometimes I run out of my prescription and forget to refill it
- I'm not sure if it is necessary
- Other: _____

Exercise 1.3: Reflecting on your hormonal therapy

What is your understanding of your breast cancer and of your risk for breast cancer coming back (recurrence)?

Do you believe that your hormonal therapy will work/is working to reduce your risk of a breast cancer recurrence?

Do you trust in your doctors' recommendation to take this hormonal therapy?
Do you have any doubts?

How comfortable do you feel asking your doctor about your treatment plan and the importance of hormonal therapy?

When a medication causes difficulties like side effects or other concerns that you identified above, it can become hard for us to take the medication the way we are supposed to. We may purposefully or accidentally skip doses of the medication. Most women taking hormonal therapy acknowledge times that they took a break from taking the medication, skipped a dose here and there, or forgot to take the medication when things got busy.

► *Thinking back to the time you have been on this medication, how hard has it been for you to take the medication regularly? Do you ever forget to take it? Do you worry whether you will be able to take it for the full length of time?*

Exercise 1.4: AIM (Articulate, Identify, Make)

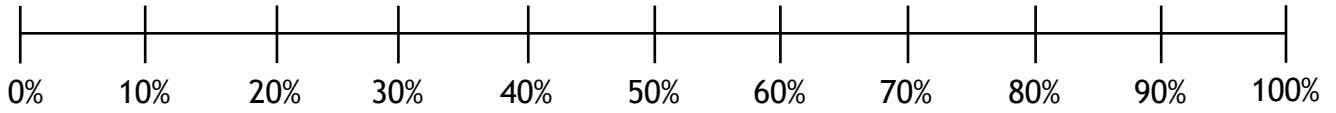
Articulate (state) your goal for taking this medication (e.g., every morning):

Identify potential barriers to reaching your goal (e.g., on vacation, pain):

Make a plan to overcome the barriers, and develop a back-up plan (e.g., bring a pill box, set an alarm):

Exercise 1.5: Hormonal therapy belief

How strongly do you believe that you will continue to take your hormonal therapy as prescribed (e.g., every day for 5 years)?



Let's examine some reasons to take or not take this medication:

	Continuing to take medication regularly	Skip doses or stop medication entirely
Pros		
Cons		

What did you notice about your pros and cons?

Do the pros of staying on the medication outweigh the cons of staying on the medication?

Do the cons of skipping or stopping the medication outweigh the pros of skipping or stopping?



While it is not always easy to take your hormonal therapy, it is one of the most important things you can do for yourself to prevent breast cancer from returning.

Women who take the medication regularly have a reduced risk of breast cancer and live longer, on average. While that may raise some concerns if you have difficulty taking the medication, the good news is that you have control over your health. Although this is not an easy therapy, there are ways to help yourself, and lessen the discomfort you feel related to it. We will work on these together.

Relaxation Training

One way to reduce stress and suffering is with relaxation. When we respond to something stressful in our environment (e.g., being in traffic, a side effect, breast cancer), our bodies prepare for “fight or flight” (to fight or flee for our lives) to ensure survival, releasing hormones and chemicals into our bodies (e.g., adrenaline) and increasing our heart rate to pump blood to our muscles. While this is helpful in the short-term, it can be difficult to turn this off, and you may find yourself in a constant state of stress. Relaxation is a tool to turn off this stress response when we are not actually in a

life-threatening situation, and to calm our body and mind when we are in a situation that we have little control over (e.g., having to take hormonal therapy and tolerate unpleasant side effects).

When we teach our bodies to relax, we can lessen our stress response by lowering heart rate, blood pressure, and the release of cortisol, a stress hormone. The more you practice the active process of relaxing, the better you will become at this skill, and the more effective you will be at calming your body in a moment of stress or worry.

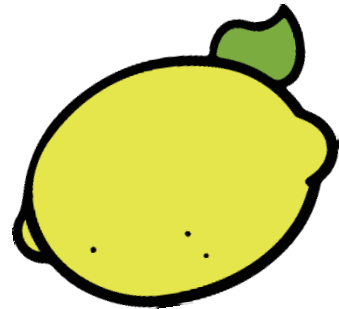
Lemon Imagery

Let's take a moment to understand the strong relationship between our mind and body.

Get comfortable in your chair, gently close your eyes, and imagine a ripe lemon on a clean white plate. Notice the bright yellow, waxy skin. Hold the lemon to your nose and smell the fresh citrus scent. Now, place it back down and slice the lemon with a knife, watching as the juice trickles out and the aroma becomes stronger. Now, bring the lemon to your mouth and slowly bite into it, tasting the sourness of the citrus fruit, noticing the sharp tang on your tongue. Allow the sensation to linger, and when you are ready, open your eyes.

What did you notice in your body as you imagined biting into the lemon in your mind? Although there is no lemon here, we respond to *imagining* biting into a lemon as if we were *actually* biting into it, illustrating the incredibly strong connection between our thoughts (imagining biting a lemon) and physical sensations (salivation).

Stress works in the same way. We perceive something to be stressful (thought), and our body responds by releasing stress hormones (physical sensation). Relaxation can slow or stop the release of stress hormones.

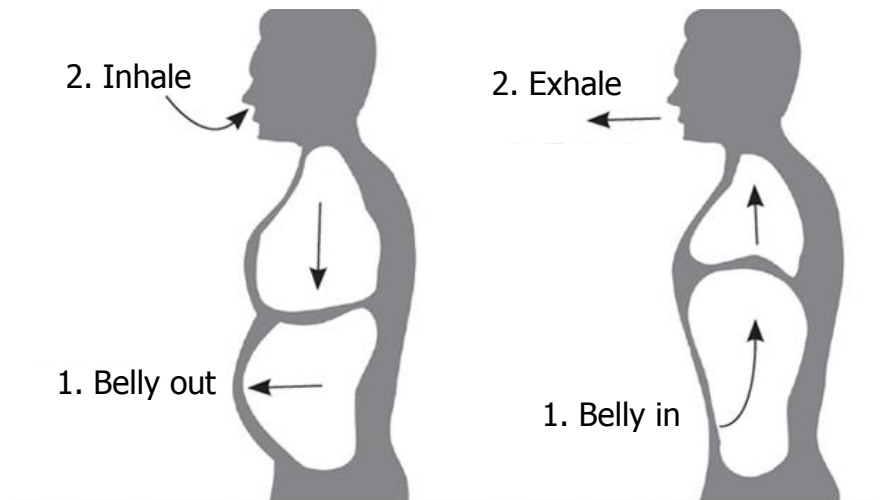


Relaxation Exercise: Diaphragmatic Breathing

Also called deep breathing, or belly breathing, breathing with the diaphragm is a helpful way to create a relaxed state. Over time, and in stressful situations, we tend to engage in “chest breathing,” resulting in shallow, tense breaths. Diaphragmatic breathing allows for full oxygen exchange, slows the heartbeat, and lowers blood pressure, creating a state of relaxation.

Try these simple steps:

- 1.** Lie on your back with your knees bent, or sit in a chair with both feet on the floor
- 2.** Place one hand on your upper chest and the other on your belly, below your rib cage
- 3.** Breathe in through your nose, taking the air in deeply, and letting your belly expand
- 4.** Breathe out through pursed lips, tighten and contract your abdominal muscles, letting your belly fall as you breathe out completely.
- 5.** Imagine that your belly is a balloon, and as you inhale, the balloon inflates, and as you exhale, it deflates.
- 6.** As you practice, the hand on your belly rises and falls with each inhalation and exhalation, while the hand on your chest remains still.
- 7.** Practice for 5-10 minutes a day.



*Take a moment to close your eyes, with both feet on the floor.
Bring your awareness to your breath as you inhale ... and exhale.*

Notice breathing in...and notice breathing out.

*Briefly scan your body...are you holding tension in any muscles,
your neck, shoulders, or jaw?*

*Try to relax those muscles, breathing in...and breathing out.
Thoughts might come in to your awareness, and that is okay, just
let those thoughts be, you don't have to be anywhere or do
anything to change them.*

*Just allow yourself to be...right here...right now. Focusing on your
breath, inhale...and exhale.*

*As you come to the end of this exercise, remember that you can
return to this feeling at any time or place throughout your day.*

*When you are ready, wiggle your toes and fingers, and slowly
open your eyes, feeling refreshed, relaxed, and alert.*

1.6: Session 1 Home Practice

1. There are several strategies that might be helpful for remembering to take your hormonal therapy pills.

Which of these strategies have you tried?

Which might you be interested in trying?

Choose or write one strategy to practice this week:

- Take it when you take other medications
- Take it when you have breakfast or dinner
- Take it when you have coffee or tea
- Have it be the first thing you do when you wake up
- Keep your pills organized in a weekly pill box
- Turn the light in your room on or off immediately after you take it
- Set a reminder on your phone or calendar
- Ask a friend or family to remind you
- Leave the pill bottle out in plain sight as a reminder
- Set a specific reminder for when you will be away or have a busy day
- Other: _____
- Other: _____

2. Relaxation: practice belly breathing for 5-10 minutes once a day.

Notes

Use this “Notes” section in whatever way fits your needs. You may use it to jot down thoughts about the session or the practice exercise.

Further reading:

<https://www.cancer.gov/types/breast/breast-hormone-therapy-fact-sheet>

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