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Focus on:  
Keeping active



# the BEACON

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## The benefits of keeping active

October was a really big month for BCNA. Our Strength to Strength national conference in Sydney was a great success with more than 600 women attending from around Australia. We heard from some of the best clinicians and researchers in the world on a diversity of subjects of interest to our members. Not only did we learn a lot, we also had a great time together and made new friends.

Breast Cancer Awareness Month attracts a lot of media and public interest in the impact of breast cancer on the Australian community. We recognise that this can be overwhelming for some of our members. It is of course not just about the women and the men diagnosed.

A diagnosis has a huge impact on families, friends and work colleagues. This widespread impact explains why October is so 'pink' and why so many people get involved in raising funds for breast cancer research and programs. You can read more about this online in my opinion piece titled 'A day to think pink', published in Fairfax newspapers on 22 October.

This edition of *The Beacon* focuses on exercise. It's something that we all know we should do but that many of us

don't prioritise. I can relate to the many reasons for putting off exercise: too busy, too tired, can't be bothered, have to get dinner on, have to get kids to school, running late for work, feeling a bit off, and so on. However, I recently saw a presentation by Associate Professor Sandi Hayes in which she said 'Imagine you could take a pill that reduces fatigue, menopause symptoms, lymphoedema, body weight, the risk of heart disease and diabetes, and your risk of recurrence. At the same time, this pill improves bone and muscle strength, emotional and sexual wellbeing, and has no unwanted side effects. Would you take it?' The remedy is of course exercise. It really brought

home to me all the benefits of exercise and how important it is to try and fit it in. Any exercise is better than none and the more you do the more benefit you will get.

Stories in this edition of *The Beacon* are from women who have achieved a level of fitness that is making a difference in their lives. Their contributions show they are obviously reaping the benefits of that exercise. BCNA's new *Breast Cancer and Exercise* booklet recommends two-and-a-half hours of exercise a week to make a difference. The development of this new resource was made possible by the funds raised from this year's Pink Bun campaign.

You can also search for physical wellbeing services listed on BCNA's Local Services Directory by visiting [www.bcna.org.au](http://www.bcna.org.au) > Find services & support near you.

As Christmas approaches I am adopting a healthier diet and incorporating more exercise into my routine – and what better way to start than walking in the Sussan fun run on 2 December.

For some of you, 2012 will be remembered as the year of your diagnosis. For some it will be a year of loss and for others it may be celebrating five, 10 or 15 years clear. From all of us here at BCNA we hope you all can have a great Christmas and we look forward to keeping in touch in 2013.

*Maxine Morand*  
Chief Executive Officer



Women at BCNA's Strength to Strength conference



# An amazing effort during October

Throughout October more than 150 *Mini-Fields of Women* were held to pay tribute to women diagnosed with breast cancer, and 130 *Pink Lady* events were held to raise money to support BCNA's work.

We recognise how much work goes in to making these events so successful. Thank you so much and congratulations to everyone involved!



# Strength within our network

More than 600 women attended Strength to Strength in Sydney. They came from every Australian state and territory and a few even travelled from overseas. It was an incredible success and we hope the women who attended feel empowered and gained strength from the information presented. We also hope they enjoyed the invaluable opportunity to connect with other women from across the country and beyond.

Keep an eye out in the next issue of *The Beacon* in March 2013 where we will include insights and information from the conference for our members who were unable to attend.

*Felt like part of a 'sisterhood'.  
Support was amazing.  
– Rachel*



*I just love being able/privileged to attend these conferences. I will be well informed and adequately equipped to pass on this invaluable information to my wider community.  
– Leonie*



*I am not alone. There is support out there. There is hope for the future. – Cathy*



*Information is power – it gives me more control. You can get lots of conflicting information so it is very important to get your info from a credible source.  
– Joan*



*The most amazing two days of information sharing that I have ever participated in.  
– Christine*



*There is a lot of ongoing research on breast cancer, its treatments and prognosis.  
– Cindy*



# Issue of concern

## Exercise and breast cancer

*I see exercise as essential and part of my treatment. Just as I have chemotherapy, I go for a swim or bike ride. – Amanda*

We know that regular exercise has enormous benefits for our general health and wellbeing, and in the prevention of diseases such as diabetes and heart disease.

There is also good evidence that exercise can reduce the risk of breast cancer recurring, with one large study finding that regular, moderate exercise reduces the risk by 24 per cent.

Regular exercise during and following breast cancer treatment has many additional health benefits for women diagnosed with breast cancer. It can help to improve physical and emotional wellbeing, including confidence and mood, sleep, bone density and muscle strength.

It has also been shown to help prevent or manage some side effects of breast cancer treatment, including weight gain, fatigue, symptoms of menopause and lymphoedema, joint stiffness and nausea.

### Recommended exercise

The amount of exercise recommended for women diagnosed with breast cancer is the same as for all Australian adults – two-and-a-half hours of moderate intensity exercise every week (or 30 minutes,

five times a week). Moderate intensity exercise makes breathing a bit harder, but does not leave you completely out of breath, for example walking as if you are late for an appointment. Incidental exercise such as gardening, housework and walking the dog can also contribute to your weekly exercise if it is done at moderate intensity.

*I walk the dog every day. It helps me stay normal, but also helps with digestion and makes me happy. I garden as well, because I love it. – Anthea*

The good news is that you can start exercising any time during or after treatment. It's important to start slowly and gradually build up, rather than do too much when you first begin. There may be times when you feel too unwell to exercise. If this happens, be kind to yourself – take a break and pick up where you left off when you can.

*Some days I just can't do it – my body just won't let me. I don't beat myself up; I have accepted that now. – Michele*

Exercises that are popular with women diagnosed with breast cancer include walking, swimming, golf, yoga and Pilates, and dragon boating. However, it really doesn't matter what sort of exercise



you do. To stay motivated, it's important to find something you enjoy. Alternating the types of exercise you do can help, as can exercising with a friend.

### Lymphoedema

Lymphoedema, or swelling of the arm, hand or breast, sometimes develops in women who have lymph nodes removed or damaged during breast cancer surgery.

Regular exercise does not cause lymphoedema. In fact, research shows that regular exercise can reduce your risk of developing lymphoedema. If you have lymphoedema, research shows that exercise does not make it worse and may actually help to manage symptoms.

*Aqua aerobics has really helped my lymphoedema; it acts like a gentle massage. – Ann*

If you have lymphoedema, it's important to speak with a qualified lymphoedema therapist before you start exercising.

### Getting started

To help you get started, BCNA has recently developed the new booklet *Breast Cancer and Exercise*. The booklet was developed in consultation with women diagnosed with breast cancer, health professionals and researchers, and contains information on the benefits of exercise, weight loss and diet, exercise programs that may be available in your local area, and practical tips to help keep you motivated.

The booklet was made possible by the support of our friends at Bakers Delight.

To order or download a copy, visit [www.bcna.org.au](http://www.bcna.org.au) > News > Resources > Fact sheets and booklets, or call 1800 500 258 and we will send a copy to you.

*There is life after breast cancer and you have the power to turn your life around. Exercise is one of the cheapest and most rewarding ways to help yourself and has, without a doubt, made a huge difference to my life. – Raelene*



# Ask the Expert

## Dr Susan Hart

*Dr Susan Hart is an Accredited Practising Dietitian and researcher. After her diagnosis with breast cancer in 2011, she developed an interest in nutrition and breast cancer and is currently writing a book on healthy eating and breast cancer.*

### What are the most important things to know about diet and breast cancer?

Research has shown that staying physically active and being at your healthiest weight are important factors in reducing the risk of breast cancer recurring. They are much more important than following a particular diet or eating particular foods.

The most important dietary factors to help maintain long-term health can be summed up with the acronym **BABE**:

- maintain ideal **B**ody weight
- reduce **A**lcohol intake
- maintain **B**one health
- keep active through **E**xercise.

### How important is body weight?

Weight and weight gain are the most important nutrition-related risk factors for breast cancer. Being fit and active and at your healthiest weight can improve the outcome of your breast cancer treatment and may reduce the risk of breast cancer recurring.

Excess fat on the waist or abdomen has been shown to be more of a risk to health than excess fat on the hips. Waist

circumference is an easy way to estimate body fat levels. It is recommended that all women aim for a waist measurement less than 80 centimetres.

### What about alcohol – how much and how often?

Due to the high energy value of alcohol and its direct link to weight gain, it is strongly recommended that women limit their consumption of alcohol, or even avoid it altogether. Research has found that alcohol increases the risk of recurrence, particularly in postmenopausal women and those who are above their healthiest weight. If women choose to drink post diagnosis, they should try to limit their intake to two standard drinks each week.

### How can good nutrition be maintained during chemotherapy treatment?

You don't have to be perfect with your diet, but do the best you can. As chemotherapy is often in three-weekly cycles, you might find that one week after chemo you eat less than usual and have unusual cravings for combinations of foods, but for week two and three you can manage fairly normal meals.

Some hints are:

- don't force yourself to eat foods you can't tolerate
- try not to avoid food totally when you're feeling sick



Susan Hart

There are a few hints about eating patterns that may be helpful:

- Try to follow a pattern that fits in with your routine and lifestyle. Could you go on holidays and still follow your eating plan? Is the pattern something your whole family can follow? If you are following a pattern that is very different to what you are used to, it may be difficult to sustain in the long term.

- Include foods that you enjoy – pleasure from food should be part of a healthy eating pattern.
- Is following the eating plan going to be a financial stretch? You don't need to fork out money for a miracle diet. While there may be some additional costs in maintaining a good eating pattern, these can be often managed. For example, you can offset the cost of increasing your intake of fruits and vegetables by spending less on takeaways, snack foods, alcohol and soft drinks.

The key is to ensure that your eating pattern meets your nutritional needs, is sustainable in the long term, doesn't socially isolate you from friends and family, and enables you to be at your healthiest weight when combined with regular exercise.

- ask for and accept help with meals from friends and family, but be specific about your nutritional needs and your likes and dislikes.

### Is there a special diet we should follow after treatment is completed?

There is no one special diet for women with breast cancer, and there is no one food that should be included or excluded. Rather, the recommended eating pattern is one that enables you to be at a healthy weight. (*'Pattern' refers to the whole diet rather than to a single food.*)

Some dietary patterns have lots of rules on foods you can eat and foods that are forbidden, which can mean eating in a very restrictive way. I don't think you need to make life that hard.

# Dietary supplements – to use or not to use?

We know through research and anecdotally that women with breast cancer are sometimes interested in taking dietary supplements to help manage the side effects of treatments or to help them feel more in control of their breast cancer experience.

Unfortunately there is not enough evidence or research on vitamin supplements and complementary medicines to know their true value. However, supplements can be categorised into those we know are helpful, those we are unsure of but don't believe cause any harm, and those for which there is some evidence of harm.

Helpful supplements may include calcium and vitamin D. Calcium can help to prevent loss of bone mineral density,

which can occur in women who have been through menopause or who are taking hormone therapy. Vitamin D helps the body to absorb calcium and is important for good bone health. Your doctor may recommend that you take calcium and/or vitamin D supplements if your levels are low.

A multivitamin may be beneficial if your intake of a key food group is poor. However, if you are eating a variety of foods and having sufficient quantities you probably won't need one.

It is very important to talk to your doctor before starting any supplements because what is suitable for one woman may not be suitable for another. Calcium, for example, while beneficial for many women can be harmful for

women with secondary breast cancer in their bones.

There are some supplements that are not recommended for women undergoing breast cancer treatment. These include vitamin C and St John's Wort, which can interfere with the way some chemotherapy and hormone therapy drugs work and make them less effective.

Others are known to be harmful. For example, high doses of beta carotene may increase the risk of certain cancers and selenium can be toxic if taken in high doses.

The Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Centre website has a comprehensive list of herbs, botanicals, vitamins and other supplements with evidence-based information about their

use, including when they should not be used and possible unwanted side effects, e.g. skin rashes. To find the list, visit [www.mskcc.org](http://www.mskcc.org) > Cancers & Treatment > Symptom Management > Integrative Medicine > About Herbs, Botanicals and other Treatments.

While this website may be a useful guide, it should not replace talking to your doctor. A discussion about any vitamin supplements or complementary medicines you are using, or considering using, will help to reassure you that there are no known interactions between the medicine and your breast cancer drugs, and that no harm will be done.

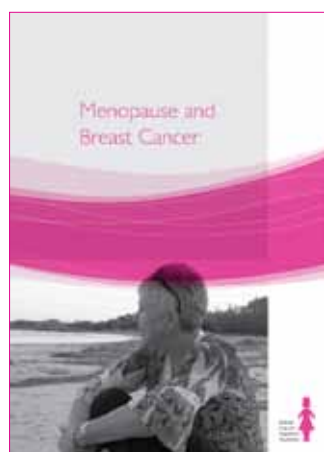
## New BCNA resources now available

Many women have spoken to us about the impact of menopause and menopausal-like symptoms throughout their breast cancer journey. In response to these concerns, BCNA has released two new booklets: *Menopause and Breast Cancer* and *Hormone Therapy and Breast Cancer*.

The *Menopause and Breast Cancer* booklet is for women with breast cancer experiencing menopause at any age. It provides practical advice and strategies on how to manage symptoms.

If you take a hormone therapy for your breast cancer, including

tamoxifen or one of the aromatase inhibitors (Arimidex®, Aromasin® or Femara®), you may also be interested in our



new booklet, *Hormone Therapy and Breast Cancer*. This booklet outlines what hormone therapy is and how it works, and gives



practical advice from other women about managing side effects.

The resources were developed in consultation with BCNA members and clinical advisers, including doctors, dieticians and psychologists. BCNA thanks the many kind women who reviewed the draft resources and provided us with advice and feedback.

Both of these resources are available free of charge. To download or order a copy visit our website [www.bcna.org.au](http://www.bcna.org.au) > News > Resources, or phone 1800 500 258.

# My quest to improve my health

I was diagnosed a year ago. Me, the Women's Health GP Cosmetic Physician, diagnosed with Stage 2 (maybe Stage 4 breast cancer). It wasn't supposed to happen to me!

Within four days I had a mastectomy and a few weeks later commenced chemo, followed by radiotherapy.

I have always been a proactive person and never accepted mediocrity. So, just as I had looked after my patients, I began my quest for health.

I have attended to my diet as best as I can. I've reduced my stress levels by taking time out from work, using the time to rethink my life plan. And, just as I always advised my patients, I



*Ilana*

am now taking and making time for me, to keep my body healthy. I'm also learning to meditate and have learnt to value this time of quietness.

During radiotherapy I stumbled upon 'Pink Pilates', a Pilates group for women dealing with any stage of breast cancer.

The program is tailored to whatever our needs are, be it generalised weakness during chemo, tightening from surgery or radiotherapy, or just whole body strengthening. What I didn't expect to gain from the classes was a very special support group; one where we

meet weekly, support each other through our physical trials and tribulations and travel along our respective journeys.

I've also started yoga and I've joined a gym and am now running 3.5 km on the treadmill, doing 'pump classes' and other classes offered at the gym.

I am enjoying the new me. I've bought skinny leg jeans for the first time in my life – and it's not just because of my improved, toned shape, but it's because my headspace and mind are in a better place. I feel confident and the time I spend exercising makes me feel positive and energised.

*Ilana, VIC*

# Small changes that make a difference

I was diagnosed with locally advanced breast cancer at the end of July 2012, so fairly recent. I am a registered nurse and actually a trained cancer nurse. I have started chemotherapy and have had two out of six cycles so far. Surgery and radiotherapy will follow.

My oncologist gave me good advice on how to change my lifestyle to reduce the recurrence rate and I took that on board immediately. Before my diagnosis I didn't do too badly in

regard to diet, but still things can be improved. So now I include vegetables with all my meals and push myself to eat more fruit. It works well and also benefits my hubby who is not really a veggie person. I started some vitamin D and calcium supplements to keep my bones healthy as well.

I also enjoyed a drink now and then, which I have cut right back for health reasons. My tastebuds left me in the first two weeks after chemotherapy and only in

the third week was I able to taste food normally again.

I re-joined the gym for some weight-bearing exercise, which for me means moderate jogging, biking, and not so much weights as I don't like them. I also walk my dog every day for at least 30 minutes, which is nothing new, but keeps me active and my 'normal' routine up. I love being back at the gym; it gives you some sense of achievement.

So all in all I feel these changes are for the better and will be permanent. I hope I can keep them up alongside my treatment, but staying positive and being in the right headspace keeps me motivated to keep fighting.

*Barbara, WA*

## A new passion in life

My first episode with breast cancer was in 1998. I was 54 years old.

A three-month course of chemotherapy followed my operation, and I noticed how drastically my energy levels had dropped. Just to walk down to the corner of the street was an effort.

Two months after the chemo treatment finished, I set myself a daily goal to walk to the corner shops. I was pleased with the progress that I was making and set off on one particular day to get a carton of milk. As I reached the supermarket,

I happened to walk past a camera shop. I glanced in the window and saw cameras with lenses of different sizes. I'd always loved photography but had only had instamatic cameras – not these beauties in the shop window!

I looked at the price tag and thought 'What are you waiting for?' I'd come through the shock of breast cancer and survived; who knew what the future would hold? I thought of all the beautiful things in the world that I could capture on one of these cameras. I promptly forgot about the carton of milk, and

purchased a camera!

My passion for photography, together with my new camera, energised me to get out there and start snapping. A whole new and active world has opened up for me since then: bushwalking and camping in different parts of Australia, travelling overseas, collecting photos and selling them to publishers and magazines. I'm filled with vitality – a very different story to the day I managed to make it to the shops for milk and bought my camera instead!

*Dianne, NSW*



*Dianne*

## 'Transformation of an arthritic couch potato'

In February 2009 I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I underwent surgery, then chemotherapy and finally radiotherapy. My doctor recommended several scans including a full body bone scan. This showed fairly extensive arthritis. I had known that my joints weren't great and this just confirmed it. At least it wasn't cancer.

After the long haul of treatment it was great to feel that life was getting back to normal, but the joint pain was getting worse. I told a friend that I really needed to get moving as I hadn't done any exercise for a long time and she recommended Curves.



*Judy*

The first time I walked in there the place was adorned with bras – all sizes and colours. They were doing a fundraiser in support of breast cancer research so I

immediately felt a connection. During my introductory session all my health issues were discussed from the cancer and my treatment, to the sleeve I was wearing to prevent lymphoedema, to the arthritis that had motivated me to get moving. I felt listened to and supported.

I have now clocked up 250 visits. Each time I go I spend half an hour completing the circuit, twice around – 30 seconds on each machine and 30 seconds in between each on a recovery station doing cardio work or another strength exercise. After that I stretch, and I've achieved my exercise goal for the day.

I originally went after work but I found it hard to stay motivated and it was too tempting to head home so I changed to mornings. It's a great way to start my day even through the cold Canberra winter.

There are mornings when I wake up feeling very stiff and sore. For some this could be an excuse not to work out, but once I have been to the gym my body feels so much better. It's thanks to Julie and the team at Curves who greet me so cheerfully each time I walk in and who encourage me and so many others each day. Thanks ladies!

*Judy, ACT*



## Simply great fun!

After being diagnosed and treated for breast cancer in 2007, my exercise consisted only of regular walks. Then I read numerous articles that concluded that regular exercise improves the quality of life of breast cancer survivors. Indeed there seems to be evidence linking regular exercise after treatment with improved survival.

This information prompted me to attend circuit classes (a mix of cardio, weights and resistance). I was the lady down the back struggling to keep up! That's when I met Kyra, the class instructor. Kyra is young, fit, fabulous and passionate about exercise. She motivates and encourages all the girls in her class no matter their age.

I am delighted to report that 12 months later, not only am I a breast cancer survivor, but lymphoedema is rarely an issue, I've lost five kilos and my fitness is improving. Most importantly, I feel great.

Nowadays, my exercise consists of two circuit classes, walking and two Pilates classes (with the remarkable Robyn) each week. The benefit of exercising with friends is well documented. It is simply great fun!

I urge everyone to get started on some form of exercise. The benefits are amazing for mind and body. I think of myself as 55 years young, instead of 55 years old.

*Christine, NSW*



*Christine (right) with Kyra*

## These boots were made for walking

Occasionally when I go walking I find money in the street. It is usually just small change, a few loose coins probably dropped by someone in more of a hurry than me. Once I even found a \$20 note, but that is not why I go walking.

I walk because my body asks me to walk. Human beings were designed to walk, not sit for long hours at a computer desk or lounge on a comfortable sofa in front of the television all day. I was a walker long before I was diagnosed with breast cancer

and spent a traumatic year recovering from surgery and treatment. But that didn't stop me from walking every day. At times there were bits of me that ached and other times I couldn't wait to get back home after a long walk, but I still kept walking.

I have always found that walking helps me to relax; it keeps me calm and centred and clears my mind. It helps me think. It is also an excellent way of escaping the dreary domestic duties I leave behind for a few hours and forgetting about doctors'

appointments or medical tests. Walking keeps me active, but walking is not only an enjoyable way of keeping me fit. It is also an opportunity to keep me connected with my community; meet and chat with old friends and new neighbours; rescue stray dogs from the street; and then, if by chance I come across a beautiful garden on my daily stroll, I stop for a few minutes, take a deep breath and smell the roses.

*Jenny, NSW*



*Jenny*

## The simple daily pleasures of life

Until I was 70 I had lived a normal life full of activities. Then, eight years ago, I had to deal with the shock of a diagnosis of breast cancer, and the subsequent surgery and radiotherapy.

It took me perhaps six months to get back into a routine. I now play golf at least once a week, care for my frail husband, attend MTC plays, read lots of books,

and host quite a few lunches for my large family and friends. The only time I am a bit anxious is when it is time for my annual review; otherwise I don't give it a thought.

I have had a couple of friends I have been able to encourage when they have also been confronted with the challenge of diagnosis.

It is important to get back to normal as soon as you feel strong enough and catch up again with friends and extended family. I do feel very fortunate that I have a loving and caring large family and a strong faith that has helped through these past years with a second chance to enjoy life to the full.

*Maureen, VIC*



*Maureen*

## Fulfilling a lifelong dream

'Don't overdo it!' I was so often cautioned over the past four years. Strangely though, after many very demanding activities (physical and mental), I have been more energised rather than exhausted. I was diagnosed back in 2008. A mastectomy followed, then therapies – chemo, radio and hormone – and then I topped it off with a reconstruction.

So, with a completed body, I was ready for the world again, and in particular, Machu Picchu! I decided to join our daughter Alicia in Peru for the month of May, to experience her backpacking lifestyle.

I set about with my 'watercise' in a friend's pool, working my joints and bones gently, but with resistance to strengthen. I pounded up and down our steep driveway to try to get my lungs and heart working better. Walks with my husband and some Pilates and light weights work were done.

I took every opportunity to move my arms, hands, feet, legs and whole body, to strengthen as many parts as I could. At times, I remembered the debilitating effects of the initial hormone therapy, which made me shuffle as if I were 150 or older! Now I could bend, move and manoeuvre most of my body in most ways.

My incentive was to keep up with any of the activities which my daughter had planned, but never could I have imagined just how many steps and inclines I would encounter nearly every day at high altitude!

Sensibly, we decided not to trek to Machu Picchu, taking the train instead from Aguas Calientes, and we spent Mothers' Day at

*Kaye and Alicia*

the incredibly historic site. After about six hours of exploring, I couldn't quite complete some of the stairways, but reflected and absorbed the immensity of it all just the same.

I am so grateful that I was active and strong enough to fulfil my dream and complete this once in a lifetime challenge!

*Kaye, QLD*



# Building a habit for life

At age 43 I was extremely busy but not very active, when my breast cancer diagnosis arrived. I undertook the whole range of treatment they threw at me. Acute symptoms of menopause aged me overnight. Sore ankle joints, hot flushes, insomnia, depression and anxiety were constant sources of discomfort to me.

In an attempt at self-help, I attended a Cancer Council series of workshops on 'Life after Cancer'. There were other women in the group who were travelling the same road as me, which was a consolation.

Setting goals, small, realistic and achievable objectives, was

the greatest resource that I took away with me and continue to use. I decided to focus on exercise and losing weight, the latter being another result of the chemotherapy.

To begin with, I started walking a couple of times a week. Then at a neighbourhood gathering, I discovered that Sandy who lives two doors down the road, was walking regularly in the same direction. We both made a small change to our starting time and now walk together. That was four years ago and we now walk five mornings a week, 30 minutes up and down hills, rain or shine, with a change of direction on two of the days.



*Jenny and Sandy*

My strong recommendation for anyone wanting to make a lasting habit of exercise is to get a buddy. To begin with not wanting to let your buddy

down can keep you going until motivation kicks in. Motivation comes when the benefits, and there are many, are truly realised.

*Jenny, SA*

# From the heart

I often feel like I must be a very negative person when I read of survivors who tell their stories after breast cancer diagnosis and mention that it has been a positive experience and the wonderful ways that they have been enlightened or motivated to be a better person.

I wonder if many people feel as I do. I feel fat (a new experience for me). I have no breasts any more – just scars. My hair is short and there's not much of it. I don't feel sexy or feminine and every time I try to do some exercise to lose weight, I am overcome with

hot flushes, joint pain and heart palpitations that really scare me. Nothing about my experience has been positive or made me feel special or inspirational.

My journey with breast cancer (double mastectomy and chemotherapy) and then years of tamoxifen has been, quite honestly, a bloody nuisance!

I read of many who have overcome so many obstacles – many more than me and with an attitude that I would embrace if I could.

I definitely don't want to depress newly diagnosed women but I



*Leanne*

wonder if there really is anyone else out there that feels like me? I have wonderful support from my family and my partner but ultimately it's my life that has been affected negatively.

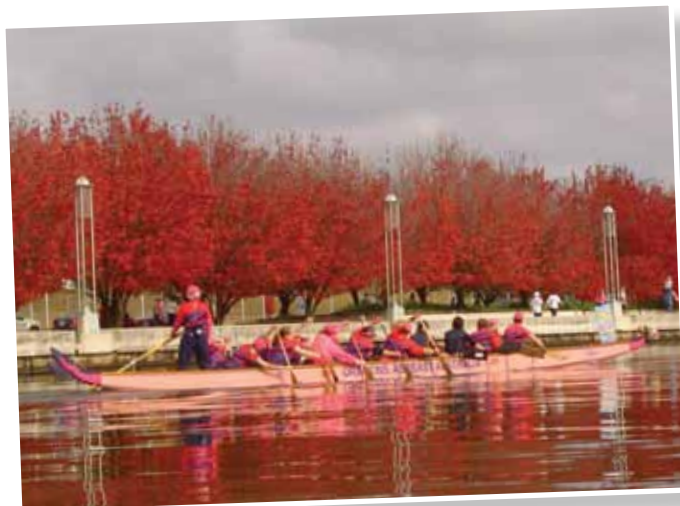
I would love to feel like 'celebrating' my surviving this diagnosis but deep down I can see all the ways that it has changed my life – not for the better. I am no longer fit, healthy or attractive, and that is not making me feel empowered. I admire, however, all those wonderful women who are fighting, have survived and are making a difference in their own or in other people's lives. I just wish it could be me.

*Leanne, WA*

## Paddles up!

Dragon boating is a transforming experience that I would never have experienced if I hadn't been diagnosed with breast cancer in 2001 at age 47. I loved reading the Dragons Abreast page in *The Beacon*. I dreamt of dragon boating after one trip with Dragons Abreast ACT when I was on chemo. In 2004, I started paddling. Simultaneously, it was strenuous endurance training, meditation and adventure on beautiful Lake Burley Griffin. I was challenged to rotate, stretch and keep in time. It was my first team sport and I was surrounded by the camaraderie of an eclectic group who were all 'in the same boat'.

I hardly knew anyone with breast cancer and now I was championed by women who



*Mother's Day Classic 2008  
Photo by Steve Taylor*

knew how to keep the spirit alive. They encouraged me to attend BCNA's Second National Conference Still MAD (Making A Difference) in Melbourne,

Dragons Abreast Australia's Chinese New Year in Darling Harbour and international breast cancer regattas in Caloundra, Qld and Peterborough, Canada.

I am an active member of Dragons Abreast ACT and BCNA which has taken me out of my comfort zone as I helped coordinate Pink Lady coaches to the *Field of Women LIVE 2007* and many *Mini-Fields of Women*, including Floriade 2010 Imagination.

Recent research reinforces the importance of exercise and being active. Dragon boating has given me the emotional strength to regain my body image, confidence and sense of accomplishment as well as shifting priorities. It's allowed me to focus on myself instead of others.

*Kerrie, ACT*

## Fitness, fun and friendship

When I tried croquet three years ago at the Nambour Croquet Club I took an instant liking to the game. The form of the game I play is 'golf croquet', which is a shorter, merrier game of about 45 minutes. It is a very good introduction to other forms of croquet which are 'Association' and 'Ricochet'.

Very shortly after I began playing I was diagnosed with early breast cancer and began my treatment which involved chemotherapy

and radiotherapy. Needless to say, many things changed. However, happily I was able to continue playing croquet (except for the times I was actually making visits to the hospital or very tired after radiotherapy).

The friendly bunch at our club scarcely turned a hair when I lost mine, as so many of them hadn't much hair themselves anyway! I found the activity and maintaining the friendships I had forged helped considerably to

remain positive and energised during the course of my treatment.

Remaining a playing member of the croquet club also meant that I continued to improve my game and it got me started bright and early in the out-of-doors. I am very pleased that I remained active in my sport after my diagnosis and treatment.

*Shirley, QLD*



*Shirley*



# Profiling our Member Groups

## Bosom Buddies reaching out

*Bosom Buddies Alice Springs was established in 2001 as a support group for Central Australians affected by a diagnosis of breast cancer. Located 1500 kilometres from the nearest metropolitan centre, the group recognises the difficulties that isolation can bring. Lesley Reilly shares how the group helps others.*

Our group meets monthly (except December and January) at the RFDS café in Alice Springs, where we gather over a cuppa, offer social and emotional support, share stories, and provide women with information and links to local services. Often the breast care nurse from Cancer Council NT attends as well, especially to support newly diagnosed women.

Our founding members were long-term residents of the Northern Territory and strong advocates of equity and access to health services for people affected by cancer. Over the years we have raised concerns with the Northern Territory and Federal governments about a range of issues including the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme, the lack of medical accommodation in Central Australia, improving access to BreastScreen for remote area women, the need for a Cancer Coordinator at Alice Springs Hospital, and the need for continuation of genetic screening services in the NT.

Our support group welcomes women affected by other types

of cancer and on occasion health professionals call on us to assist, particularly with those who may be isolated from family support or from a different cultural and linguistic background.

Alice Springs has tremendous community spirit, and we constantly have reason to be thankful for the wonderful generosity shown to us by businesses, community organisations and individuals. Through fundraising and grants we have been able to undertake a number of projects, including the acquisition of a scanning laser for Alice Springs Hospital to improve care options for lymphoedema sufferers.

From 2007 to 2011, we collaborated with Indigenous breast cancer survivors from a number of language groups and with Remote Women's Health Educator Sandy McElligott to develop and produce a multilingual DVD resource for remote women of traditional backgrounds: *Listen You Women Your Breasts are Precious*.



Financial support from local organisations made this possible and we are all immensely proud of this achievement, especially as it is now valued by many other areas across the country.

One of our key interests is promoting the messages about health and wellbeing after breast cancer. As well as resources donated to places such as the chemo unit, we organise information forums where presenters speak about topics such as lymphoedema prevention and management, meditation and relaxation, professional support after a diagnosis, and the role of exercise in managing health and preventing recurrence.

We are fortunate to have a plethora of choice in our community when it comes to exercise. The Alice Springs Town Council has undertaken the Healthy Communities Initiative, providing a range of exercise programs and a specific Yoga After Breast Cancer program. The YMCA also runs the Strong for Life program.



## Linking together

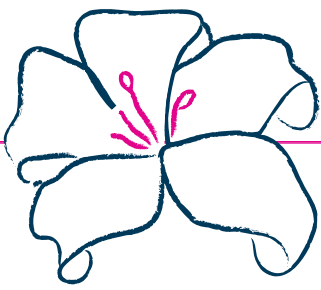
Over the past 14 years a key part of BCNA's mission has been to link Australians personally affected by breast cancer.

We welcome new Member Groups to our network. They now total 313.

New Member Groups:

- Breast Friends in Canberra – Canberra, ACT
- Brown Cows – Hampton, VIC
- Cabrini Breast Buddies – Brighton, VIC
- Candles Cancer Support Group – Lakelands, NSW
- Kellyville Breast Buddies – Kellyville, NSW
- Metastatic Breast Cancer Group – Randwick, NSW
- Pink Roses – Dandenong, VIC
- St George Hospital Breast Cancer Support Group – Kogarah, NSW
- The Giving Circle – North Sydney, NSW
- Young Pink Sisters – Scoresby, VIC

To find Member Groups, including support groups, in your state or territory visit [www.bcna.org.au](http://www.bcna.org.au) > Sharing & support > Find a support group in your area.



# Thank you

Thousands of generous supporters across Australia donate their time and money to support BCNA. We would especially like to acknowledge significant contributions recently received from:

- 8 Days Café – Jason Ennels and Ruairaidh Gunn, VIC
- Anita Jimenez, NSW
- Blush Ball Veneto Club – Nadia Bearzatto and committee, VIC
- Blush Breast Cancer Ball Toowoomba – Sharyn Donaldson and committee, QLD
- Brigid Piro, SA
- Bronte and Deborah Fitzpatrick, QLD
- Catherine Rolston, NSW
- CSIRO Werribee – Sharon Kort, VIC
- Deb & Pearl's Pink Party – Deb Murray and Sandra Parker, VIC
- Hastings Deering – Donna Miller, QLD
- Heather Christmas, VIC
- Isabel Perez, NSW
- Jog for Jugs – Peta Burton, QLD and WA
- Karen Middleton, WA
- Katherine Coleiro, QLD
- Kathy Tsaples & Prahran Market, VIC
- The Key Club – Peter Oliver, VIC
- Kitty Barron, QLD
- Kristy Wallace FITT4U, NSW
- Le Couture Fashion Show – Kate Smith and committee, VIC
- Lutheran Community Care – Richard Fahy, QLD
- Mandurah Mad Mums Tea Party – Kimberley Paton and committee, WA
- Maree Egan, VIC
- Mount Hotham Alpine Resort – Belinda Trembath, VIC
- Narelle Breen, VIC
- National Council of Jewish Women of Australia – Wendy Bookatz and committee, NSW
- Our Lady of Good Counsel Primary School – Julie Medak, VIC
- Perisher Resort – Helen Blackmore-Lee, NSW
- Pink Lady Art Exhibition – Lisa Sowards and committee, VIC
- Rainbow Beach Surf Lifesaving Club – Maree Van Oirschot, QLD
- Royal Motor Yacht Club, NSW
- Sandra Western, NSW
- Serco – Ali Marshall, TAS
- Sharon Scoble, WA
- Springvale RSL – Barbara Richards, VIC
- Terrene Cask, NSW
- The Manildra Foundation
- Thirteenth Beach Ladies Christmas Golf Day – Diane Hobart and committee, VIC
- Touch of Pink Gala Cabaret Cohuna – Carole Heap and committee, VIC
- Tugun Art Exhibition – Lorrie Ledwell, QLD

- Victorian Pink Ribbon Ride – Terry Caffery, VIC
- Woodcroft Devonshire Tea – Joan Egel, SA

We would like to extend a special thank you to those who contributed to the fundraising efforts at our annual Pink Lady Melbourne Luncheon.

## Memorials

We pay tribute to the lives of:

- Betty Marie Scarr
- Ida Beryl Lock
- Janel Carolyn Green
- Lianne Nitchke
- Maureen Ann Green

We are grateful for the donations we received in their memory.

## Celebrations

Thank you to those who celebrated a special occasion and asked for donations to BCNA in lieu of gifts:

- Denise Elliott
- Janice Quadrio
- Jen Colombo & Greg Plant
- John Wills
- Joy Ayres
- Pierina & Narciso Zaina



## CD Review

### Genetic

by Dee Handyside

Produced 2008 by Peachy Club

I didn't want to listen to Dee Handyside's CD *Genetic* at first because I felt that I had been down the same path myself and that I wanted to move on. However, a couple of weeks later, I sat down on my own with the booklet of lyrics and turned on the CD. This time I listened with an open mind to the journey Dee



had taken after her diagnosis of breast cancer and realised that our experiences were similar. My foot began beating in time with the music; I was engrossed with the lyrics. I enjoyed the varying tones of voice used throughout and the instrumental solos.

Dee expresses beautifully her reactions to her diagnosis and treatments from using descriptions of storm clouds to evoke her feelings about coping with what lies ahead and getting through the waiting time, to openly admitting her fears in *I'm scared*. In her notes to *Just Think Positive* she writes 'You are entitled to have the odd negative day – it's your ironic right!' I remind myself of this every day. *Thank You Friends* includes performances by family and friends and is a song of appreciation sung from her heart

cheerfully and joyfully. The final track *The Unknown Destination Train* ends her story brightly with encouraging words for those who have to 'jump on board'.

While I don't feel this CD would necessarily be helpful to someone who has just been diagnosed, for those who have travelled or are still travelling this journey I feel it is a valuable resource.

*Beryl Hellwig, NSW  
Review and Survey Group  
Member, BCNA*

# Introducing our Board

BCNA's Board is made up of 10 individuals who have been personally affected by breast cancer. They are leaders in their fields and generously volunteer their expertise, inspiration and, importantly, compassion and understanding for those affected by breast cancer. Here we profile two of our Board members so you can get to know the people behind the Pink Lady.

## Raelene Boyle

### Tell us about your experience of breast cancer.

I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1996. It was a very difficult time for me – while I was facing my own mortality my mother was dying from lung cancer. I had chemo and radiation and felt like I had fought the good fight but was later diagnosed with ovarian cancer. I think I have had my fair share of ups and downs now.

### How did you get involved with BCNA?

I was attending a publicity launch of a magazine company. I had been tightly managing my breast cancer media and this was one of only two events where I was happy to deal with the media pack. I was having one of my hot flushes and my minders were helping me to the lift.

The lift doors had begun closing and I was almost safe when a foot came through the door. The foot belonged to Lyn Swinburne, BCNA's founder.

By the time we got to the car park, Lyn had convinced me that her vision for BCNA was something that really resonated with me. That was in 1998 and I am still here!

### What inspires you to volunteer your time as a Board member?

I am completely driven by the women. I want the system to work for them, I want to make sure that the women of today have a better experience than those of yesteryear.

I have felt so proud of the many programs and campaigns that we have developed. The *My Journey Kit* is such a wonderful resource for women newly diagnosed. I wish it had been



Raelene (middle)

around for me.

But my proudest achievement has certainly been when we were able to push Herceptin on to the PBS, firstly for women with secondary breast cancer and then for women who were newly diagnosed. It really emphasised

the importance of working with government, health care providers and consumers to make a difference.

I also love having the opportunity to meet so many of our women and their partners or support crew when I go to forums. I get so much from the women.

### What are some of the ways you keep active?

I am one of the 50 per cent of women diagnosed with breast cancer who are affected by anxiety and depression, and keeping active is a very important part of managing my depression. I walk every day and go to the gym three times a week. It really has made a big difference to my mental and physical wellbeing. And my new puppy will be arriving as this issue hits your mailbox!

## Terry Bracks

### How did you get involved in BCNA?

I had an initial meeting with Lyn Swinburne and really liked the work that BCNA was doing – focusing on the woman rather than the disease. I was also attracted to working with Lyn. Her sense of humour, dedication and intelligent approach to running a not-for-profit organisation made it hard to resist becoming involved.

### What inspires you to volunteer your time as a Board member?

The breadth of work that BCNA manages to do on behalf of the

women and the fact that this work is very much guided by the needs of our members is inspiring. We have a terrific staff and very hands-on Board who are a wonderful, diverse team to be a part of.

### How have stories about breast cancer affected you?

The stories of the women confirm to me why I am involved in BCNA. Their courage, their resilience, their black humour at times, the fact that they just 'get on with things' and the support that they give to each other is amazing.

### What are some of the ways you keep active?

I walk with two friends twice a week in the morning. We have been walking together for about 18 years now and make sure that we get up with the alarm rather than rolling over and going back to sleep, which is always very tempting. I have also recently become a 'middle-aged woman in lycra' and ride my bike at least once a week with a group of friends – making sure that we stop for coffee and muffin of course.



Terry

# Pink Lady around the world



BCNA Member Jill Hicks in South America.

## Join our mailing list

Would you like to be on the mailing list for **The Beacon** or **The Inside Story** (a supplement for women with secondary breast cancer)? To subscribe, telephone 1800 500 258, email [beacon@bcna.org.au](mailto:beacon@bcna.org.au) or visit [www.bcna.org.au](http://www.bcna.org.au) > Resources.



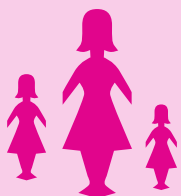
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BCNA  
293 Camberwell Road,  
Camberwell, Victoria 3124  
1800 500 258, (03) 9805 2500  
[beacon@bcna.org.au](mailto:beacon@bcna.org.au) or  
[www.bcna.org.au](http://www.bcna.org.au)

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## A new way to help BCNA



### Make a recurring donation

We rely on the generosity of individual supporters and sponsors who share our passion and commitment and we are excited to announce that we have recently launched a regular giving program. This means people can choose to set up an automatic regular donation to BCNA. It's designed to make it easier for our supporters to help us and also reduces our administration costs.

You may like to let your support team or community know that they can support us in this new way and continue to help us provide free programs, resources and support to all Australians affected by breast cancer. To set up a recurring donation visit [www.bcna.org.au](http://www.bcna.org.au) > Donate, or phone 1800 500 258.

## Seeking stories – Body matters

We are seeking stories for the Winter 2013 issue of *The Beacon* about **body matters**. How has breast cancer affected your body image? Did body image influence your decision

regarding reconstruction? Do you feel you are still the same person even though your body may look different? The stories should be about half a page long (200–300 words) and can be

posted to BCNA, 293 Camberwell Rd, Camberwell 3124 or emailed to [beacon@bcna.org.au](mailto:beacon@bcna.org.au) by the end of March 2013. Please also include a high-resolution photo.

BCNA gratefully acknowledges our partnership with Bakers Delight.



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