

## Cancer, Body Image, and Mental Health

The physical changes most cancer patients experience can have an impact on their body image and mental health. A recent survey by Texas Oncology polled 150 current and former cancer patients across the southwestern U.S. to better understand the impact cancer has on **self-perception, body image, and mental and emotional health**. Texas Oncology is sharing the survey results to raise awareness about the ways that cancer can impact body image and mental health and to spark a conversation that brings greater understanding and validation to the **physical, mental, and emotional** experience of all cancer patients.

### The Physical Effects of Cancer on Body Image

When it comes to understanding how the physical changes cancer patients experienced impact the way they view their body, **45%** of respondents said they **felt grateful** for their body's perseverance throughout treatment. Despite this, many respondents also indicated negative impacts to the way they view their bodies, and **34%** said they **expected the changes** in the way they **view their body** to be **permanent**.

- **50%** felt less attractive
- **42%** felt **less self-confident**
- **37%** did not feel as comfortable in their own skin
- **36%** **avoided intimacy**
- **31%** felt less feminine/masculine

*"I wish more people knew that everything doesn't just go back to normal after our treatments are finished." – Survey Respondent*

### The Physical Effects of Cancer on Mental Health

Patients and survivors overwhelmingly said the changes they experienced to their body during cancer treatment impacted their mental health. While **43%** of people said they **felt unprepared** to deal with the **physical side effects**, **56%** felt unprepared for the **mental side effects** experienced during cancer treatment. Respondents also shared a variety of mental health challenges during treatment.

- When asked about specific symptoms, **70%** of survey respondents experienced **one or more** symptoms of depression and **65%** anxiety
- **60%** experienced feelings of depression
- **55%** experienced feelings of anxiety

*"Find a **trusting partner** who is willing to go through the journey with you **with unwavering support**." – Survey Respondent*

### The Effects of Cancer on Relationships

Cancer patients often feel isolated, which can lead to symptoms of anxiety and depression. In those who experienced changes in the way they view their body, **38%** of survey respondents said their **relationships strengthened** with loved ones, while **34%** said their relationships **weakened**. Having a strong support system when going through treatment can have a positive impact on a patient's mental and emotional health.

- When asked about romantic relationships, **49%** of people said the bond with their **spouse** was **negatively impacted**, and only **15%** was positively impacted.
- Millennials (**87%**), Generation X (**54%**), and Baby Boomers (**42%**) continued to **maintain personal relationships** during treatment.
- **68%** of women relied on their **friends for support** throughout their cancer journey and **47%** of men.
- More women (**60%**) than men (**40%**) said they relied on their **children**.
- **46%** women and **28%** men relied on their **siblings for support**.
- Nearly **three in ten** women said their cancer diagnosis **weakened** their relationship with their partner

and/or spouse, while just **8%** of men said this weakened their relationship.

- Nearly half (**46%**) of women said their diagnosis **strengthened** their relationships with their **friends**, compared to **31%** of men.

## Cancer Patients Hesitant to Seek Support Services

It is important for cancer patients to talk with their care teams about how their cancer journey impacts their **emotional, spiritual, and mental health** so that they get helpful support. The survey results also indicated a gap in cancer patients' desire for **increased mental and emotional support**, and how those needs were being met.

*"When navigating cancer, try **EVERYONE** and **EVERYTHING** for support. It may not sound right for you, yet it may be." – Survey Respondent*

- The top **two ways** cancer patients wished they received **more support** were **emotional (46%)** and **mental (39%)**.
- When asked if they sought out support to **help cope** with the **mental or physical side effects** of cancer treatment, **only one third** sought out physical and mental side effect resources and **25%** sought resources for just mental side effects.
- **59%** said they were **very or somewhat** hesitant to seek out support services.
- **12%** received individual therapy and **7%** participated in professional-led support groups.
- **100%** of those who sought out and relied on support groups rated the quality of support they received as **excellent or very good**, and **83%** of people who did individual therapy said the same.

Cancer can make patients feel isolated but having a strong support system when going through treatment can have a positive impact on their mental and emotional health. It is important for patients to consult with their physician and care team if they are feeling symptoms of anxiety and depression. If a patient, or someone they know, is struggling with self-acceptance and/or other negative thoughts, feelings, or emotions, ask a member of the care team about resources available to help manage these symptoms.

Cancer treatment can impact patients' quality of life, and specific treatments may result in a need for additional [support services](#) such as nutritional and financial counseling, assistance with home healthcare, and emotional health reassurance. Patients should talk with their care team about difficulties that may impact their treatment or health.

### About the Survey

The 150 participants in the blinded, 33-question, self-administered online survey included current and former cancer patients in Texas, Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, and New Mexico. Survey participants were chosen from the general population in the southwestern region of the U.S. The only criteria for survey participation was a diagnosis of cancer. The average age of the participants was 55 years old – the youngest participant was 25 years old and the oldest was 76 years old. Participants represented a wide range of cancer types including breast cancer, skin cancer, gynecologic cancer, blood cancer, lung cancer, thyroid cancer, colorectal cancer, prostate and testicular cancers, head and neck cancers, and sarcomas. Using outside field services, the survey included both qualitative and quantitative questions. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no estimate of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

### About Texas Oncology

Texas Oncology is an independent private practice with more than 525 physicians and 220 locations across the state and southeastern Oklahoma. Meeting the oncology needs of Texans for more than 35 years, the practice includes Texas Center for Proton Therapy, Texas Breast Specialists, Texas Colon and Rectal Specialists, Texas Oncology Surgical Specialists, Texas Urology Specialists, Texas Imaging & Infusion Center, and Texas Center for Interventional Surgery. As a lead participant in US Oncology Research, Texas Oncology has played a role in the development of more than 100 FDA-approved therapies. For more information, visit [www.TexasOncology.com](http://www.TexasOncology.com).