Thank you very much for your participation in this research project, we really appreciate it! Your time, intellectual input and feedback will go a long way towards enabling us to design better exercise bras for women living with a breast cancer diagnosis. The following report is a brief synopsis of some of your results.

1. Who completed the survey?

Distribution and demographics
The survey was distributed through the BCNA’s Review and Survey group, and the Cancer Councils of Victoria and Western Australia. Four hundred and fourteen (414) women aged 23 to 77 years old completed the online survey. The average age of women who responded was approximately 53 years old.

Over two thirds of these women (293 women; 70.7% of the sample) were within 5 years of their initial breast cancer diagnosis.

Types of surgeries
There was a fairly even split between lumpectomy and mastectomy groups - 179 women had undergone a lumpectomy (41.4%) and 182 women had undergone a mastectomy (42.1%). Seventy-five of the 182 women who had undergone a mastectomy had initially had a lumpectomy on the same breast (17.4% of entire sample). Fifty-nine women underwent a double mastectomy (13.8%) with 24 of these women (5.6%) having initially undergone a double lumpectomy.

2. What was said about exercise?

“Exercise is essential, for the social contact, you certainly feel much more alive, and enthused, and energetic.”

Reported exercise participation
Most respondents (328 women, 77.5%) reported engaging in at least some form of moderate exercise. However, less than a quarter of respondents (103 women, 24.4%) reported engaging in any vigorous exercise.

If we consider the TIME and INTENSITY of each exercise activity reported, we are able to group our sample into high, moderate, low and minimal exercise levels using an Australian Bureau of Statistics classification. Based on these classifications, 4 women (1.0%) engaged in high levels of exercise activity, 18 women (4.2%) engaged in moderate levels, 290 women (68.6%) engaged in low levels of exercise, and 111 (26.2%) were considered sedentary (minimal exercise; less than 100 minutes of exercise a week – less than 15 minutes a day).
Types of exercise done (moderate-intensity)
Women in our sample undertook many forms of exercise. Walking was the most popular mode of exercise, reported by 281 women (65%). Other popular forms of exercise included gardening (n = 120; 27.8%), stretching (n = 103; 23.8%) and gym circuits (n = 96; 22.2%).

Types of exercise done (vigorous-intensity)
Gym circuits were the most popular mode of vigorous-intensity exercise, with 51 women (49.51%) reporting participating in them. Other popular forms of vigorous exercise included cycling (23 women; 22.33%), paddling (21 women; 20.39%) and aerobics (19 women; 18.44%).

Exercise benefits and barriers
Women who responded to the survey identified various barriers to, and benefits of, exercise. The four top barriers to exercise that women identified were “I procrastinate when it comes to exercise”, “I am fatigued by exercise”, “I can’t find a comfortable bra to exercise in”, and “I lack the self discipline to exercise”. Despite these barriers, there was a strong response regarding the benefits of exercise with 99% of women agreeing that “exercise improves the functioning of my heart and lungs”; 98% of women agreeing that “exercise improves my physical health”, and 95% of women agreeing that “exercise improves my mental health”.

3. What was said about bras?

“I WOULD LOVE THEM TO FIT BETTER AND BE MORE COMFORTABLE. I WOULD LOVE TO BE OFFERED A BIGGER VARIETY OF BRAS, FOR THEM NOT TO BE SO EXPENSIVE, AND FOR MORE STAFF TO BE TRAINED IN HOW TO FIT WOMEN WHO HAVE HAD A MASTECTOMY”.

“I KNOW I WANT TO FEEL FEMININE, BUT LOOK FOR THE COMFORT FACTOR. I ALSO NEED TO FIND BRAS THAT SUPPORT ME CORRECTLY, BUT HIDE THE SCARS I HAVE ON MY BREAST”.

Types of exercise bras worn
Mastectomy bras were the bra most commonly worn by respondents during exercise, reported by 100 women (24.4%) as their usual exercise bra. A standard everyday bra with underwire was the next most commonly worn bra during exercise (91 women; 22.2%). Interestingly, only about one fifth of respondents (80 women; 19.6%), wore a bra specifically designed for exercise (sports bra; with or without an underwire).

Reported exercise bra discomfort
In response to direct questioning, almost half of the respondents (184 women; 44.4%) reported that their exercise bra was uncomfortable. The band of the bra was found to be the “most uncomfortable” with 70 of the 184 women (41%) indicating this was a problem for them. The straps, cups and underwire shape were the next three most uncomfortable parts of the bra.

Ranking factors of exercise bra
The women who completed the survey identified “How comfortable it is” as the most important factor when purchasing a new exercise bra. They then ranked “whether it fits you”, “how much support it gives you” and “how much it costs” as the next three most important factors.
4. Where to from here?

We plan to use the unique information provided to us by the survey to design a range of comfortable bras, which address the specific needs highlighted in the online survey. We will then test how well these bras provide comfort and support by measuring the amount of breast motion the bras are able to reduce during exercise, as well as the pressure exerted by the bra on various parts of the skin. This testing will be conducted using state-of-the-art technology within the Biomechanics Research Laboratory at the University of Wollongong.

We hope this study will ultimately result in exercise bras that will permit women living with breast cancer to be able to enjoy the benefits of exercise in comfort. We will continue to send you updates on our research through the BCNA, and hope to conclude the project by the end of 2011.

Warm regards and many thanks,

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