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A new study shows that providing women with skills to manage stress early in their breast cancer treatment can improve their mood and quality of life many years later. Published early online in *CANCER*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society, the findings suggest that women given the opportunity to learn stress management techniques during treatment may benefit well into survivorship.

At the turn of the century, 240 women with a recent breast cancer diagnosis participated in a randomized trial that tested the effects of a stress management intervention developed by Michael Antoni, PhD, of the University of Miami. Dr. Antoni and his team found that, compared with patients who received a one-day seminar of education about breast cancer, patients who learned relaxation techniques and new coping skills in a supportive group over 10 weeks experienced improved quality of life and less depressive symptoms during the first year of treatment.

In their latest report, the researchers found that the women who received the stress management intervention had persistently less depressive symptoms and better quality of life up to 15 years later. “Women with breast cancer who participated in the study initially used stress management techniques to cope with the challenges of primary treatment to lower distress. Because these stress management techniques also give women tools to cope with fears of

recurrence and disease progression, the present results indicate that these skills can be used to reduce distress and depressed mood and optimize quality of life across the survivorship period as women get on with their lives," said lead author Jamie Stagl, who is currently at Massachusetts General Hospital, in Boston.

Stagl noted that breast cancer survivors in the stress management group reported levels of depression and quality of life at the 15-year follow-up that were similar to what is reported by women without breast cancer. Also, the intervention was helpful for women of various races and ethnic backgrounds. "This is key given the fact that ethnic minority women experience poorer quality of life and outcomes after breast cancer treatment," said Stagl.

As survival rates increase for breast cancer, the question of how to maintain psychosocial health becomes increasingly salient. The current findings highlight the possibility that psychologists and social workers may be able to "inoculate" women with stress management skills early in treatment to help them maintain long-term psychosocial health.

"Because depressive symptoms have been associated with neuroendocrine and inflammatory processes that may

influence cancer progression, our ongoing work is examining the effects of stress management on depression and inflammatory biomarkers on the one hand, and disease recurrence and survival on the other," said Dr. Antoni.