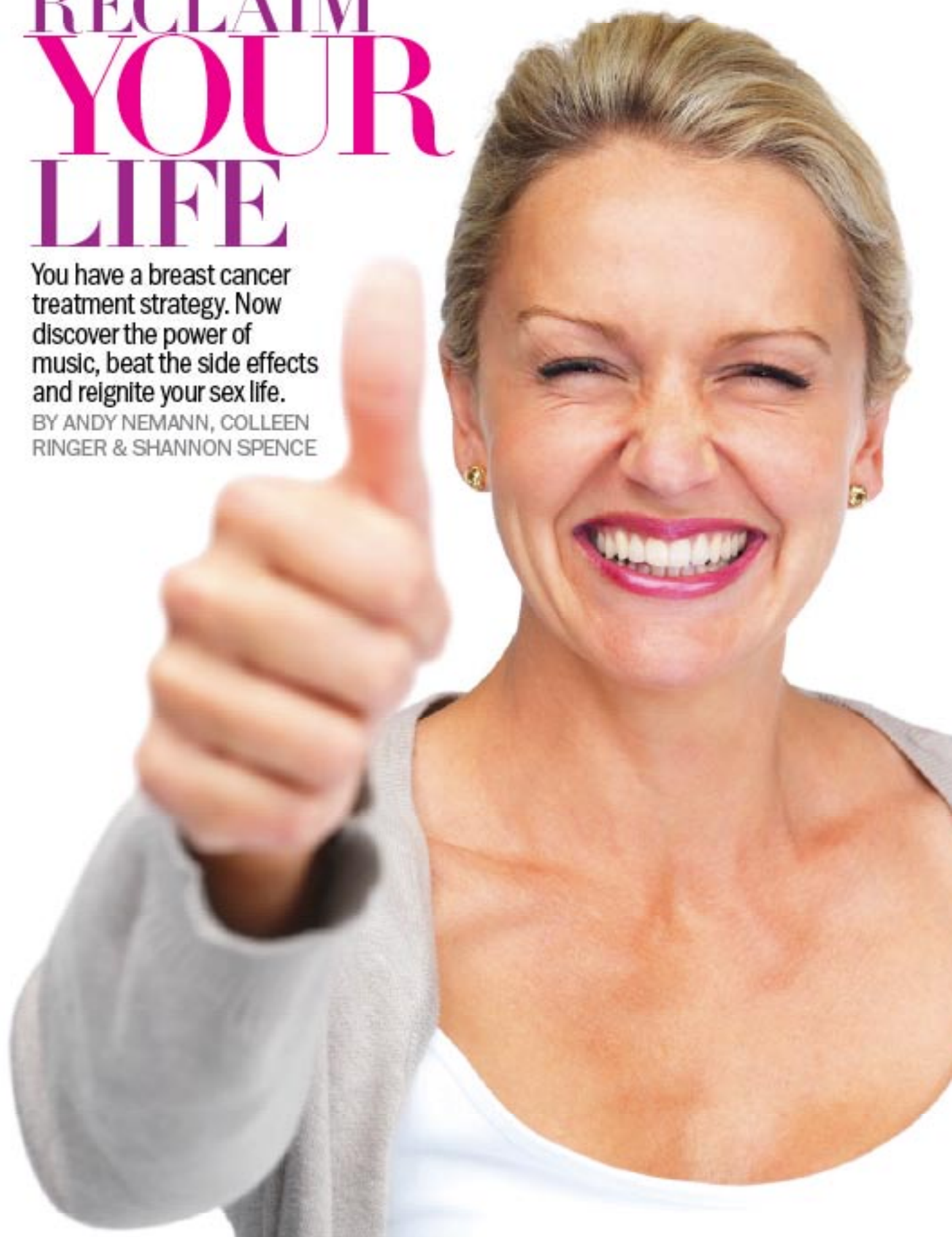


● ● ● COVER STORY

RECLAIM YOUR LIFE

You have a breast cancer treatment strategy. Now discover the power of music, beat the side effects and reignite your sex life.

BY ANDY NEMANN, COLLEEN RINGER & SHANNON SPENCE



MUSIC'S POWERFUL PUNCH

To many, music therapy translates to popping in a favorite album, reclining on the couch and letting the soothing sounds relieve the aftermath of a stressful day. But the actual practice of music therapy for breast cancer patients entails much more than pressing "Play."

"It's an interpersonal process between the therapist and the client," says Karen Popkin, music therapist at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York City. "It's an intervention."

Just as music affects everyday moods, so too can it have a powerful influence on the mind-set of breast cancer patients going through treatment.

"Our goal is to help individuals improve, restore or maintain health in some way," Popkin says.

With cancer patients especially, where treatment can be a painful and uncomfortable process, music works to alleviate the stress and anxiety that oftentimes tags along.

Pari Forood, executive director at Miles of Hope Breast Cancer Foundation, has noticed that patients receiving music therapy are able to maintain a better frame of mind when receiving treatment, which can prove vital in treatment efficacy.


"I've seen some individuals who've been frightened and very tense and worried (become) better able to express their fears, which

generally has the result of lessening those fears by being able to speak the unspoken," Popkin says.

This is accomplished through a variety of methods. Some choose to simply listen, some choose to sing or play (even if they've never played an instrument before), and some choose to physically feel the vibrations as the instruments are played.

It is a very personal experience, one that extends beyond the walls of the hospital.

"Music therapy goes way beyond breast cancer and right to the heart of healing for just about everybody," Forood says.



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EASE THE EFFECTS

There is never a more important time to do good things for yourself than when undergoing treatment for breast cancer.

Coping with the seemingly endless list of side effects from chemotherapy or radiation is draining. And while certain medications alleviate some side effects, such as nausea, drugs aren't the only things that will make you feel better. Improve your outlook and show the side effects who's boss.

Exercise

When you're run down, being active may seem like an impossible task, but the benefits are enormous. "There is increasing evidence that those people who exercise more during chemotherapy actually do better in terms of fatigue," says Dr. Halle Moore, staff physician in solid tumor oncology at Cleveland Clinic. So make that yoga class a priority, or take a walk with a friend. You'll be glad you did.

Massage

Treating yourself well is just as important as your next radiation appointment, and a good massage can go a long way. One University of Miami study

found breast cancer patients who got a 30-minute massage three times a week felt less depressed and angry and had more energy. Many cancer centers offer massage as part of the treatment options.

Acupuncture

Several studies have shown that acupuncture reduces fatigue, hot flashes, nausea, vomiting and pain. One such study from Duke University found acupuncture was better at controlling nausea than the drug Zofran.

Wigs

It's not a certainty that any treatment will cause hair loss, but if it does happen, use the opportunity to explore hidden elements of your personality. Experiment with wigs in different hairstyles and colors. See how you look as a blonde or with longer hair. The possibilities are endless.



A HEALING RUB

Developed by two-time breast cancer survivor Jean Soulios, Jean's Cream contains vitamin and plant extracts that soothe and protect the skin during radiation treatment. Its efficacy and popularity with cancer patients has led to its use by those with eczema, diabetes, psoriasis and other skin conditions. The natural ingredients make this cream perfect for sensitive skin and intimate areas of the body. \$21.50 for 2 ounces, jeanscream.com



The New Normal

Being a breast cancer survivor and a first-time mother are all part of normal life for Lincoln Park, N.J., resident MICHELLE KAPLAN. The 39-year-old Kaplan decided to pursue her dreams of being a mother after triumphantly ending two years of treatment for breast cancer in 2006.

"While going through treatments, I repeatedly thought, If I get through this what is going to be different in my life? What is truly important?" Kaplan says. "And the No. 1 thing that popped into my head is that I wanted to have a child. I really didn't know how it was going to happen."

Kaplan decided adoption was her best option, but that wasn't an easy process. She quickly learned that, because she had recently finished cancer treatments, she wasn't eligible to adopt in many countries, including the United States. "Guatemala was the only place that accepted all of my documentation, including a letter from my oncologist saying that I'm, hopefully, in 100 percent remission," Kaplan explains. "So I did the adoption process there and brought my daughter, Mia, home in July 2007 when she was 8 months old."

A year later, the new mother made the decision to have a prophylactic double mastectomy.

Kaplan calls her current life "the new normal."

"The new normal teaches you that life is full of choices and that you decide each day how you are going to live it," Kaplan says. "It's a huge responsibility being a single parent, and I had the added stress of switching jobs. My experience with cancer, however, gave me a new-found confidence in myself." By Sue Bruskin Clarke



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BREAST CANCER & THE BEDROOM

Breast cancer, it seems, takes no prisoners and that includes your sex drive.

"It is not in your head," says Mary K. Hughes, a clinical nurse specialist in psychiatry at the MD Anderson Cancer Center. "There are physiological changes in your body that cause changes in sexuality."

Chemotherapy, for instance, can throw a woman into early (and often permanent) menopause.

"When you're having a hot flash, you don't want to be around anyone," Hughes says. "And without estrogen, your libido will be affected." Personal dryness is yet another side effect of treatment.

So, yes, in a nutshell, breast cancer changes your sex life. But on the bright side, it can be an opportunity for you and your partner to speak more openly about the topic and to try new things (take a walk down *that* aisle at the grocery store and see what you find).

In addition, it's important, Hughes says, to continue physical contact during and after treatment. Let your partner know you welcome hugging, kissing and touching. Hughes also advises clients to schedule



ROLL INTO REHAB

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surgery as you work at your own pace from the comfort of home. \$49.95, pinkribbonshop.com

date nights with their partners that they agree will end in a sexual encounter.

"If you have a set time, then you know," she says. It takes the guesswork out of the equation and puts both of you on the same page, sexually speaking.

And if you're not ready for sex, that's OK, too, says Lauren Zirilli, a breast cancer survivor. "There are other ways to be intimate," she says. "Explore those until the time comes that you yourself feel ready."

It's important to continue physical contact during and after treatment. Let your partner know you welcome hugging, kissing and touching.



A Portrait of Support

PHILLA BARKHORN goes the extra mile to bring out the best in people. Whether boosting their confidence through triathlon training or lifting their spirits by painting a portrait, Philla's philosophy is to help when you can.

In January 2006, less than a year after completing her first Danskin Women's Triathlon and just days after organizing a workshop for local women interested in competing in future events, the 48-year-old Chatham, N.J., resident was diagnosed with breast cancer. That didn't stop her. She continued to coordinate training sessions and even participated in several more triathlons. Triwomen, which began as a small group of Chatham-area women, now totals about 700 participants.

Last year, when the mother of three came down with an illness unrelated to her cancer, Barkhorn decided to step down as leader of Triwomen and focus her attention on another passion—fine art.

"I had joined a cancer support group and became close with a young woman named Lisa who passed away," Barkhorn says. "I wanted to do something to commemorate her life." Using a photo of Lisa sitting with her mother on what would be her last Christmas, Barkhorn painted a portrait of the women, which she gave to Lisa's mother.

"She said that since her daughter had died, she had been looking for a sign that she was OK, and looking into Lisa's face in the portrait, she got that sign," Barkhorn says. "It was just so powerful."

The artist went on to paint a portrait of her own mother, who had died of pancreatic cancer, as well as of other women who had passed away from, or were living with, cancer. This turned into a series titled "Women Whose Lives Have Been Touched by Cancer," which has been on exhibit at various venues in New Jersey. *By Sue Bruskin Clarke*



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*—Pari Forood, Miles of Hope
Breast Cancer Foundation*