

Massage helps supplement breast cancer therapies

STORY BY JENNY DEPPER • PHOTOS BY PAUL LITMAN
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Breast cancer. Those two little words can turn a roomful of women silent. Now imagine you are the woman who receives the news that you have been diagnosed with the disease. Putting yourself in someone else's shoes is a phrase we often hear, but it can be difficult to really understand what someone else is experiencing.

Boulder resident, Eeris Kallil understands. She understands how it feels to think you are alone in this fight. She understands how your body reacts to treatments and surgeries galore. Most importantly, she understands that women need a place to turn when they receive a breast cancer diagnosis.

Kallil, who is an eight year survivor of breast cancer, had already seen her mother and sister fall to the disease. After her bout with breast cancer, Kallil reopened her massage therapy and healing practice, Bodywork Wisdom in Boulder. This time around she wanted to be able to help women with breast cancer who were looking for a resource other than their regular physicians.

Her practice has a steady following, and she has now become an expert in alternative and supplemental breast cancer therapies.

"After my diagnosis it was such a devastating experience. I had friends and support, but I didn't have any internal support. I needed someone to touch me, love me, hold me and help me find peace; and it's important that my work be able to give that," Kallil says.

Breast cancer patients who visit Kallil's practice have the opportunity to receive a variety of treatments based on their particular needs. Kallil says, "I talk to all my patients and find out exactly what they need. It's important also to know where they are in their stage of the disease."

Kallil explained that massage therapists should be cautious about doing body work on a patient before they have started any medical treatments. She says there are still studies that suggest massaging the cancerous area before medical treatment can potentially increase the spread of cells.

After a thorough evaluation Kallil can begin treatment, basing her hour-and-a-half-long sessions on her clients needs.

For those who are about to undergo a mastectomy Kallil offers a unique therapy known as a breast ceremony.

"When my clients know they are going to lose their breasts I suggest that they do a breast ceremony. The purpose of this ceremony is to honor, support, pamper and empower the client," Kallil says.

Michele Nahas, a breast cancer survivor described the very poignant and special process of a breast ceremony. "When Eeris suggested this at first I was skeptical, but in the end it was an amazing and supportive process. Most people don't realize how powerful ceremony is."



For massage on a breast cancer survivor, Eeris Kallil concentrates around the breast, shoulder and armpit areas to help alleviate pains from treatment.

Practicing Prevention

At Phoenix Healing Center in Longmont, Dr. Amber Wolf is encouraging women to take a stand against breast cancer. Here are a couple tips she suggests:

- Self breast examination — It only takes 20 minutes
- Exercise — 30 minutes of aerobic exercise may lower your risk by 30 to 50 percent
- Stay healthy — avoid excessive alcohol, fatty foods and smoking
- Get green — Be sure to eat your fruits and veggies
- Dr. Wolf also offers a breast exam and tutorial at her private practice. Pamper your breasts with a how-to self examination, breast examination, and a breast facial
- For more information, visit saveyourbreasts.com.



Eeris Kallil, CMT, of Bodywork Wisdom in Boulder, gives a massage to breast cancer survivor, Bethany Aronow, who has now been cancer free for eight years.

Nahas says at her ceremony she had her close girlfriends attend to help give her support. "Each one of my girlfriends shared stories about how they have learned to face their fears and then gave me encouraging words about how to face my own fears about having the [mastectomy] surgery."

The grand finale of the ceremony is usually the making of a plaster of paris mold of the clients breasts so she can have something to remember her body by.

Kallil admits, "I know it sounds very 'new agey', and I am very sensitive to where people are in their belief system. I can meet them wherever they are comfortable. The goal is to give my clients a sense of empowerment."

However, treatment does not stop there. For clients who choose to undergo mastectomy or lumpectomy surgeries Kallil offers breast cancer massage, which helps with rehabilitation.

Breast cancer massage is a fairly new treatment that seeks to help in the mental, emotional and physical healing process. Therapy ranges from shiatsu, to deep tissue massages, or simple gentle strokes of the body. With the deep tissue and shiatsu massage Kallil says this helps with the mobility of the affected area.

"After surgery the body's reaction is to tense up the muscles, so it is important for clients to get those areas relaxed and mobile again," Kallil says.

In the end not all patients want massage or treatments, some just want to talk or to feel like there is something to look forward to.

Kallil says, "We all know someone who has experienced this disease I want women to know there is someone out there who cares, who can listen and who can love."

Eeris Kallil teaches breast cancer massage at the Boulder School of Massage and continues her work at Body Work Wisdom. For more information, e-mail eeriskallil@aol.com.