

Fact Sheet for Health Professionals: Motivating Change in Patients and Parents/Caregivers

Effective Communications

- The most effective health messages help people:
 - Understand the topic enough to make informed decisions,
 - Believe that they can take positive actions,
 - Feel that they can make a difference in their health across their lifespan, and
 - Set clear and achievable goals that promote overall health.
- In addition, health messages should:
 - Encourage an individual's attempts to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions;
 - Be delivered in a compassionate and culturally appropriate manner.
- In order for individuals to be open to messages about the risk of breast cancer, they first must perceive that they (or their daughters) are susceptible to developing the disease.
 - When talking to an adolescent patient, consider addressing some of the myths that teenagers are known to believe in, such as “getting hit in the chest can cause breast cancer.” Dispelling these kinds of myths may make it easier to focus on known and potential risk factors.¹
 - Mothers may have the perception that women are getting breast cancer at an earlier age.¹ Addressing this concern can give health professionals the opportunity to provide accurate information that encourages parents to discuss breast health, the importance of a healthy lifestyle, environmental exposures that may affect girls' risk of developing breast cancer later in life, and associated behavior changes with their daughters.
 - Women who are of childbearing age should be told about the potential risks to the fetus from exposures to environmental factors such as endocrine-disrupting chemicals (e.g., phthalates and bisphenol A (BPA)). The key message for these mothers is that reducing exposure to certain potentially harmful environmental chemicals is critical at all stages of their child's life.
 - Mothers who have a personal history of breast cancer are significantly more likely to provide advice to their daughters about breast cancer risk.² Messages for these mothers should explain the potential role of environmental exposures and how they may interact with genetics to increase risk.

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- Help parents, caregivers, and patients understand that research on the causes of breast cancer is ongoing and our knowledge of the different types of environmental factors associated with increased risk will continue to evolve.
- In addition, it is important to explain that breast cancer is a complex disease. The risk for developing breast cancer could be the result of numerous environmental exposures across the lifespan, as well as genetics. Reducing exposures may help to reduce risk, but eliminating one possible risk will not necessarily mean eliminating all risk of developing breast cancer.
- Motivational interviewing techniques may help facilitate behavioral change.³ This includes explaining what is known about the risk and then posing questions to lead the parent or patient to their own understanding of the impact that certain exposures might have. In this way:
 - The parent or patient is not being asked to accept the advice without question.
 - The more sensitive topics regarding risk factors for breast cancer, such as early puberty, obesity, and eating habits, can more easily be broached, even if the patient or parent/caregiver does not believe they are likely to be diagnosed with breast cancer later in life.

Cultural Sensitivity/Cultural Competence

- Health messages are most effective, and create less of an emotional burden, when geared to the cultural, social, historical, environmental, and psychological forces that influence the target health behavior in a population.^{4 5}
 - This may involve examples citing people, places, language, food, household products, and clothing familiar to, and preferred by, the culture of the parents and/or the patient.⁶
 - Advice, or the language used to express advice, may need to be adapted based on cultural differences and associated perceptions. For example, the body ideal of African American and Hispanic women tends to be larger than the body ideal held by Caucasian women.⁷⁻⁸
 - Two specific issues that may require cultural sensitivity are discussions of weight and reproductive processes.
 - There are differing perceptions regarding weight gain and obesity among various ethnic and racial groups. For example, perceptions of the ideal body size for Black, Hispanic, and Pacific Islander women tends to be larger than perceptions held by White women.⁷⁻⁸
 - In certain cultures, specific terms may not exist for reproductive organs or for certain reproductive processes that are commonly and openly referred to in the United States.

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- Cultural sensitivity may also mean identifying who should deliver the message to the parent, caregiver, or patient. For some individuals, the gender of the health professional may make a difference when discussing topics such as early puberty and breast cancer. It may be more appropriate for health professionals to deliver such messages.

For additional information on cultural competency, go to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) website on Clear Communication and Cultural Competency (<http://www.nih.gov/clearcommunication/culturalcompetency.htm>) and the Department of Health and Human Services Department of Minority Health website, which provides standards for culturally and linguistically appropriate services (www.thnkulturalhealth.hhs.gov).

To learn more about environmental exposures and breast cancer risk, download a monograph for health professionals and/or patient education materials at www.info.bcerp.org.

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 - ⁷ Barroso, C. S., Peters, R. J., Johnson, R. J., Kelder, S. H., & Jefferson, T. (2010). Beliefs and perceived norms concerning body image among African-American and latino teenagers. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 15(6), 858-870.
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