

AFTER CANCER – OM

IT'S SAID THAT happiness can come from the simplest things. For women who've had treatment and/or surgery for breast or other cancers of the upper body, that can be as basic as doing up their bra, says Susi Hatley. Scarring can leave their muscles weak and tight, which can restrict movement and range of motion explains Hatley, a kinesiologist and therapeutic yoga instructor. "When women can put a bra on the way they normally put a bra on, they often feel normal again," she says.

Hately has been treating clients, both during and after cancer, for more than 20 years at her Functional Synergy studio in Calgary. In 2001 she created a program for the University of Calgary – researchers were looking for beneficial physical activities for cancer patients. From their learnings she developed Calm, Steady, Strong; a set of yoga, meditation and breathing practices.

The program helps reduce fatigue and anxiety and improve strength – and trust. Hatley says that people

can feel betrayed by their body after a cancer diagnosis. "By consistently practising gentle movements and breathing techniques, they can become quieter inside and they are able to regain their inner sense of self, also known as their kinesthetic sense. That is what really helps them move forward." In addition to recovery resources, she has found that these cli-

ents also seek privacy – she sees most one-on-one. That's why she developed the program for DVD in 2009 (www.functionalsynergy.com/shop) and, last fall, launched calmsteadystrong.com where subscribers can stream it online. She also trains instructors across North America. Go to www.functionalsynergy.com/contact-us to request a referral. –Tara Losinski



BRINGING SEXY BACK

DR. FAY WEISBERG has learned something about boomer women during her 25 years as a gynecologist. "These are women who enjoyed sex and they tell me, 'I still want to have sex, and that shouldn't change just because I'm older.'" But symptoms of genitourinary syndrome of menopause (GSM), including vaginal dryness and irritation of the vulva, can take sex off

the table for them. And they're not the only group.

Despite other causes, as many as 40 per cent of women under 40 – and 90 per cent of those over 40 – go into menopause as a result of undergoing chemotherapy for breast cancer. Earlier this year, Weisberg introduced the MonaLisa Touch vaginal laser treatment for GSM through her FemRenew clinic in Toronto. She started by offering it on the house and extended that to women of the cancer centres at Sunnybrook – where she is

also on staff – and North York General hospital. One woman in particular sticks out for Weisberg – a 49-year-old who hadn't had sex in 15 years. She sent flowers between her second and third treatment. "When she came back in, she hugged me," Weisberg recalled. "Breast cancer patients can feel less feminine because of their disease and their surgery, so it's sort of the last straw that their vagina is then taken away."

Add to the abstinence list, says Weisberg, are her patients who have ►

partners with performance issues as well as those taking medications, such as anti-depressants, that can lower libido. The rub for all women not having sex, says Weisberg, is that frequent intercourse can be the best thing for the vagina because of the blood flow and natural lubrication it stimulates.

There are no risks or contraindications from the MonaLisa laser so any woman, regardless of age, experiencing pain, dryness and

irritation can be a candidate, Weisberg notes. Her patients report little or no irritation with results lasting as long as a year and starting as soon as after their first session – patients are normally prescribed three to start. It works by “damaging” the vaginal walls to elicit a healing response. “It brings lubrication. It brings thickness. It gets rid of the dryness. It works like estrogen without using estrogen.” That suits her patients, more and more

of whom want an alternative to hormone replacement therapy (HRT). And it’s especially important for breast cancer patients, 80 per cent of whom are ER-positive. That means their cancer cells grow in response to estrogen. “It sounds like a small niche, to do something for women who have breast cancer, but they’re grateful that someone realized this is a problem and that there’s something safe to use that’s going to give them back what they’ve lost.”

Weisberg also provides patients with vaginal health protocols, recommending water-based lubricants to avoid chemical irritants. Another easy-care-down-there tip: to moisturize the sensitive skin in that area, avoid petroleum jelly and drugstore vaginal creams as they can alter the vagina’s pH, says Weisberg. “The best thing is Crisco shortening,” she says with a chuckle. “It’s cheap. It’s over-the-counter and easy to use. I love it.” –TL



To watch Barbara Alink’s ideacity presentation, go to www.everythingzoomer.com/alinker.



UPWARD, ONWARD

IF I LOSE A LEG, in my dreams I’ll still run,” Barbara Alink declares, somewhat appropriately given we’re standing near Philosopher’s Walk in downtown Toronto. Reflecting on her passion for fostering community, what Alink may lack in Aristotle’s classical teachings, she makes up for with a yellow mobility device that looks like a reverse tricycle for grown-ups – two

post-war disaster zones like Kenya, Kosovo, Indonesia and Afghanistan. She eventually moved to British Columbia in 2008 and, inspired by her mother, she built the first Alinker prototypes in 2011. While on the surface it’s a tool that allows the user the freedom to exercise their legs, remain at eye level with others and enjoy greater independence, the device is also the 52-year-old’s way of bringing people together at the most

intimate, individual level.

“I’m lonely, I start eating worse, I don’t move anymore and I get diabetic or I get heart disease – all those habits come from [the fact] that we are lonely and we don’t belong,” she explains. With the Alinker, she notes, “Your muscles are stronger, your condition is better and you’re so much happier. It’s cheaper than a dog because you don’t need to feed it, but it’s got the same sort of effect. You go out in the park, and everybody talks to you.”

While Alink tends to the mounting list of orders for Alinkers on her website, she notes it’s received glowing reviews in the Netherlands. And this past June, at the annual ideacity conference (created by ZoomerMedia founder Moses Znaimer), she received a standing ovation after telling the story of the device.

“We are all disabled at some time in life, and that’s just being humble,” she says, putting her philosopher’s hat back on. “My grandma always said we’re all born little naked creatures who just want to be happy. That’s who we are.” —Mike Crisolago

For more info, go to www.thealinker.com or the ZoomerShow (a ZoomerMedia property) in Toronto Oct. 29 and 30.