

Cancer Advances: Young Women With Breast Cancer are Very Concerned About Fertility Issues

Posted online on October 12, 2004 on www.jco.org [1] [Read the original study](#) [2] More than 11,500 women under the age of 40 are diagnosed with breast cancer each year in the United States. Unfortunately, breast cancer therapies may cause some of these women to experience symptoms of menopause, either temporarily or permanently, which can result in loss of the ability to have children. Even women who continue to have normal menstrual cycles following treatment may go through menopause earlier or may be less fertile than their peers. A new study published in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology* examined young breast cancer patients' attitudes about fertility. The majority of women surveyed were very concerned about their ability to have a child, as well as the effect that pregnancy might have on their disease returning. Researchers noted the challenge of addressing a patient's concern about fertility, given the relative lack of research on the risk of infertility following breast cancer treatment, especially for newer treatment regimens. Researchers surveyed 657 women from the Young Survivor's Coalition, an international, nonprofit network of breast cancer survivors, finding that 57% of women under 40 reported being concerned that cancer treatment would affect their fertility. Nearly one-third said this concern influenced their decisions about treatment. In addition, the study found that 72% of women had discussed fertility issues with their doctors, and 17% had talked with fertility specialists. Although 51% of women felt satisfied after talking with their doctors, 26% said that their concerns had not been adequately addressed. Researchers found that women may overestimate the risk of becoming infertile, and underscored the importance of improved communication about fertility between breast cancer patients and their doctors. In addition, they highlighted the need for more research on the link between cancer treatment and subsequent fertility, as well as the development of new approaches for preserving fertility in women treated for breast cancer. **What Does This Mean For Patients?** Young breast cancer patients should talk with their doctors about concerns regarding fertility during and after cancer treatment, and should ask their doctors about the effects of different breast cancer treatment options on fertility. It's important to note that infertility among young breast cancer patients following certain chemotherapy regimens is relatively uncommon, especially for those under 30, and that additional research is needed to help younger women make more informed decisions about their breast cancer therapy.

Links:

[1] <http://www.jco.org/>

[2] <http://www.jco.org/cgi/content/full/22/20/4174?ijkey=sGcRr.G7O.hgM&keytype=ref&siteid=jco>