

## A Program Just for You

Established in 2005, Young and Strong, the Program for Young Women with Breast Cancer at Dana-Farber's Susan F. Smith Center for Women's Cancers, provides comprehensive care and support to young women confronting the challenges of living with and beyond breast cancer. Our mission is to enhance care and education for patients and their families, as well as to advance understanding of the biology of breast cancer and the experience of the disease through ongoing research focused on younger women. More than 5,700 young women have been enrolled to date.

For more information about Young and Strong, please contact the Young and Strong team at [youngandstrong@partners.org](mailto:youngandstrong@partners.org), or visit [www.danafarber.org/YoungAndStrong](http://www.danafarber.org/YoungAndStrong).

You can also follow us on Twitter @YoungStrongDFCI.

## Decision Fatigue – Is That What You're Feeling?

A note from Sarah Gatti, LICSW

### What Is It and How Did We Get Here?

Have you recently found yourself in your kitchen holding a half-eaten banana with no real memory of how you got there? Oh, me neither. I was just asking for a friend.

If you happen to be that friend, you may be experiencing a symptom of decision fatigue – an evolving concept in the COVID-19 pandemic which acknowledges the mental impact of the reality that we are currently facing more complex and potentially high-risk decisions than ever before. Simple activities such as going to the grocery store, getting a cup of coffee, handling your child's education, or meeting up with a friend, have become a matrix of navigating competing values with what feels like high-stakes consequences. This constant barrage of managing the safety concerns of COVID-19, along with all of life's other challenges (breast cancer treatment, work, parenting, school, social life, financial concerns), can leave us mentally depleted to the point where it's difficult to keep track of the small stuff, like the fact that I am currently eating a banana.

### Practicing Self-Care

There are no magical solutions to help conquer decision fatigue, but a good place to start is to think about how you are taking care of yourself during this time. I often feel suspicious when people bring up self-care. I barely have time to comb my hair, let alone fit in a luxurious spa day (though I am very interested in that). Instead of focusing on the big self-care events, I would suggest looking for small, practical ways you can add extra care or kindness into your day, perhaps by giving yourself a mini-massage while putting on your lotion, making a gratitude list while brushing your teeth, or lighting a scented candle for 10 minutes before bed. Utilizing our five senses is an excellent way to infuse extra care into our daily routines. Ask yourself if there is something you could see, smell, touch, taste, or hear that would bring you additional comfort during this time or help ground you in a moment of distress. How can you make sure you have easy and routine access to that picture, essential oil, smooth stone, chocolate bar, relaxing music, or whatever sensory tools work best for you?

Sometimes the intention of caring for yourself can help you discover unexpected ways you can refill your cup, so to speak. Recently, a patient shared that her top self-care activity is taking a breath before she responds to her ever-present and inquisitive 3-year-old. She said that this small breath lets her control her response almost – drumroll please – 50% of the time! I appreciated her honest acknowledgement about how much this breath helps. Her story has me asking: are there parts of your routine where you could infuse a thoughtful pause to feel more in control in this time?

It's important to be realistic about what our self-care will do for us. One pumpkin latte is not going to permanently reset us so we always feel energized, organized, calm, and safe, but it can provide a sensory experience that allows you to pause, breathe, and reset. These small acts of self-care sprinkled throughout our routine can both help reduce our overall stress before it becomes overwhelming and can be excellent tools to re-center when we are feeling overwhelmed or reactive.

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# Supplements: The Real Deal

Stephanie Meyers, RD, LDN, and Anne Kelly, MSN, NP

Many people turn to dietary supplements or herbal products as a way to promote health, treat simple ailments, and help with side effects from cancer treatment. If you are thinking of beginning a new supplement or have questions about supplements that you are already taking, you are not alone! But here's the real deal – reading articles online or browsing the supplements aisle in the grocery store will not help you figure out what is right for you, and it won't arm you with the proper information to make these decisions alone. Supplement use is highly dependent on each individual's needs and it's recommended that you discuss which dietary supplements you should and should not take with your health care providers.

## Understanding Your "Why"

Why do you want to take a supplement? Ideally, your reason is more specific than "I know many other people taking it," or, "because I heard it's good for cancer patients." In other words, your reason should relate to how the supplement might benefit you personally. Your health care providers can also help you to answer this question. Common supplements and their **marketed** benefits are listed below.

- Vitamin D – bone health
- Turmeric – anti-inflammatory
- Vitamin C – immune support
- Omega-3 fatty acids – heart health
- Probiotics – gut health



Often, your health care team **may not** recommend taking supplements. There are several reasons this may be the case. For instance, the benefits of the supplements may not be clear, or it may be better to obtain the nutrients by eating whole foods. Therefore, supplements are sometimes just not necessary and may not be beneficial to you. More information on how to incorporate some of these nutrients into your diet is shown on page 3. If supplements are necessary for you (either because you aren't obtaining enough of these nutrients in your diet or for other medical reasons) and you are considering taking multiple supplements, it's best to start one at a time. This helps sort out any potential intolerance issues. In order to ensure that you are taking the right amount of a given supplement and receiving benefit from it, ask your care team what dose and frequency of the supplement is recommended.

## More Is Not Always Better

Most people take supplements in an effort to be healthier, but dietary supplements can be harmful if not used correctly. It is important to check with your treatment team before taking them. For example, some vitamins (such as vitamins A, D, E, and K) are fat-soluble, meaning that they are absorbed along with fat, stay in your body longer, and have the potential to build up and sometimes cause problems. For instance, too much vitamin D can lead to kidney stones. Water-soluble supplements such as vitamin B and C are easily excreted in urine and are less likely to cause problems. It is important to limit your intake to the recommend amount so that you avoid problems from excess levels of the vitamins in your body.

## Decision Fatigue - Is That What You're Feeling?, *Continued*

### Altering Your Mindset

Another area I would invite you to consider is thinking about your thinking. Extensive neurocognitive research has helped identify the conditions for ideal mental functioning and, no shocker here, we are currently not experiencing the best conditions for this. Therefore, we can't expect ourselves to function optimally. There are real external concerns impacting each of us right now and we all have to adapt in order to bolster our health and well-being. To stay committed to the standards of "normal times" or hold ourselves to optimal mental functioning would, in many or most instances, produce negative outcomes. This is why it is important for us all to alter our mindsets. These are not normal times, so normal standards don't apply. Give yourself permission to acknowledge the impact of what is happening and adjust your boundaries – and be kind to yourself in that process. For example, if you would normally respond to an email or text within an hour, it now might take a day, or perhaps your kids are getting a little extra screen time and that's ok.

There is no perfect solution to decision fatigue, but there are some guiding principles that have helped me alter my mindset, improve my self-care, and ultimately decrease my decision fatigue. Practice a higher level of kindness towards yourself and your loved ones, infuse your day with small, simple acts of self-care, name what you need in this time and be open to having different standards or boundaries, and of course, enjoy a good banana, even if you can't remember how you got it.

### Managing Misinformation

There is a lot of misinformation surrounding dietary supplements and herbal products. For example, advertisements often contain "marketing lingo" and not medical language. Claims about these products found in magazines, websites, and on the radio can be misleading and aren't always rooted in scientific evidence. In fact, there is little to no research to support many supplement claims. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not approve or regulate supplements and does not oversee their safety. Additionally, manufacturers of supplements do not need to show that their claims are true. Therefore, just because a product is labeled "natural" doesn't mean it's always healthy or non-toxic. Sometimes it may mean the product is actually less safe, because there is no foolproof method for healthcare providers to tell what is in the product. The best way to manage misinformation is to involve your care team.

### The Real Deal

Despite uncertainties and the need for more research, supplements can be quite beneficial if appropriately advised by your care team. Medical oncologists, nurses, and registered dietitians are great resources to utilize when discussing if and which supplements may be right for you. Ask your health care team about the safety and benefits of dietary supplements and herbal products, how they work in conjunction with traditional cancer treatment, and which ones may best fit your diagnosis, treatment schedule, and interests. It is important to remember that these are individualized recommendations, and what supplements may be best for you may not be the supplements that are best for someone else. If you would like to connect with a registered dietitian, please email [youngandstrong@partners.org](mailto:youngandstrong@partners.org) and we will help connect you.

## Nutritionist Tip – Food First

Ideally, you should try to obtain nutrients from food before taking supplements. According to Stephanie Meyers, RD, LDN, a registered dietitian at Dana-Farber, “Consuming whole foods instead of supplements ensures you receive all the nutrients and fiber that food provides. We know that many of the beneficial nutrients found in foods work in concert with one another. When they’re separated out in various supplement pills we can’t expect to get the whole host of benefits like when eating the food.” Below, you can find information on how to incorporate some useful nutrients into your diet.

### Vitamin D

Vitamin D is a fat-soluble vitamin the body can make with exposure to sunlight or get through food and supplements. Vitamin D works in combination with calcium and other minerals to help protect and strengthen bones. It is recommended that you consume about 1,000 International Units of vitamin D per day through food and/or supplements to help you maintain blood levels of vitamin D around 30-50 ng/mL. The below chart provides ideas on how to incorporate vitamin D into your diet.

Food	Vitamin D3 (IU)
Herring, Atlantic (3 oz)	1384
Salmon, pink, canned with bones (3 oz)	530
Catfish (3 oz)	425
Tuna, chunk light, canned in oil, drained (3 oz)	201
Milk (fluid, all kinds) (8 fl oz)	100
Vitamin-D-fortified milk alternatives (such as soy milk or almond milk) (8 fl oz)	100
Vitamin-D-enhanced orange juice (8 fl oz.)	100

### Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Omega-3 fatty acids are called “essential fats” because the body cannot make them. This means they must come from food or supplement sources. Research shows that omega-3 fats promote heart health and help regulate inflammation in the body. Omega-3 fats are found in the following foods:

- Fatty fish such as salmon, herring, sardines, lake trout, mackerel and bluefish
- Walnuts
- Ground flaxseed
- Chia seeds
- Hemp seeds
- Omega-3-fortified eggs

If you can, eat fatty fish 2-3 times per week and incorporate other, less potent vegetarian sources of omega-3 fats. This recommendation may seem overwhelming or even impossible, but there are many ways to incorporate these foods in ways that you might actually enjoy, even for the picky eaters or vegetarians. In this [video](#), Stephanie Meyers gives tips on how to overcome the common barriers that people face when incorporating fatty fish in their diet including cost, smell, finding good quality fish, and knowing how to properly prepare it.

### Turmeric

Turmeric is an earthy, golden-yellow spice that gives curry its color and taste. Studies show turmeric has anti-inflammatory effects, but there are currently no definitive guidelines on how much turmeric you should take or consume. If you’re interested in adding turmeric to your diet, try building it in with food sources and cooking. Examples include turmeric tea, chickpea noodle soup, turmeric blueberry muffins, and crispy breaded cauliflower. Here’s a [video](#) showing you how to use turmeric in several of these recipes.

## Spotlight – EMBRACing Young and Strong

A community for young women with metastatic breast cancer

The Young and Strong Program is pleased to formally announce its newest initiative – EMBRACing Young and Strong. This new community was developed in collaboration with Dana-Farber’s EMBRACE (Ending Metastatic Breast Cancer for Everyone) Program to address the unique needs of young women living with metastatic breast cancer (MBC). Launched in May 2020, this initiative combines the collective strengths and expertise of both the Young and Strong and EMBRACE programs to offer educational and social programming and supports specifically tailored to young women with MBC. All events are centered around the common goals of building community and support. With the help of a dynamic group of young patient leaders living with MBC, EMBRACing Young and Strong has provided a safe space for participants to build relationships and discuss their individual and shared experiences. “This group has been an integral part in my life as I live with MBC. I can share anything from my concerns about treatment to other details about what is going on in my life. It feels great to know that these women get it - that they understand what it’s like to be younger and dealing with a stage IV diagnosis. Our shared laughter and formed connections make each day better!” says group member Allison R.

So far, the program has hosted multiple social events as well as three educational events. These events have focused on managing relationships, managing life during treatment, and dealing with the obstacles related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on group members’ feedback, educational events also include ample time to chat and connect with one another. In response to COVID-19, all events are currently virtual. While there were some initial concerns that this may hinder personal connections, we are pleased to learn that the virtual setting has actually enhanced relationships, as women from all parts of the country are able to attend from the comfort of their own homes and breakout rooms facilitate small group connections. “I’m so grateful for the connections I have made and the amazing women I have met through EMBRACing Young and Strong. Metastatic breast cancer can be very isolating, and COVID-19 has made that isolation even worse. Since I joined this group, I have been able to find support from other women and I no longer feel alone,” says Beth G.

We look forward to continuing to expand this community in the upcoming year. If you would like to be part of EMBRACing Young and Strong, receive more information, or be included in program-specific emails, please email [youngandstrong@partners.org](mailto:youngandstrong@partners.org).



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND INFORMATION



**Susan G. Komen**  
[www.komen.org](http://www.komen.org)

Susan G. Komen for the Cure is the world's largest grassroots network of breast cancer survivors and activists working together to save lives.



**Young Survival Coalition**  
[www.youngsurvival.org](http://www.youngsurvival.org)

The Young Survival Coalition (YSC) is an international, nonprofit network of breast cancer survivors and supporters dedicated to the issues unique to young women with breast cancer.



**Living Beyond Breast Cancer**  
[www.lbbc.org](http://www.lbbc.org)

Living Beyond Breast Cancer (LBBC) is a national organization whose goal is to improve quality of life and help women in their recovery or management of the disease.



**LIVESTRONG Fertility**  
<http://bit.ly/2qxgc5S>

LIVESTRONG Fertility, a program of the LIVESTRONG Foundation, provides information and support to cancer patients and survivors whose medical treatments present the risk of infertility.



**Bright Pink**  
[www.brightpink.org](http://www.brightpink.org)

Bright Pink is the only national non-profit organization focusing on the prevention and early detection of breast and ovarian cancer in young women, while providing support for high-risk individuals.



**FORCE**  
[www.facingourrisk.org](http://www.facingourrisk.org)

Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered (FORCE) is the only national nonprofit organization devoted to hereditary breast and ovarian cancer. Programs serve anyone with a BRCA mutation or a family history of cancer.

# Support and Education

## SoulMates

A peer mentoring program providing guidance and support to women with early-stage (0-III) breast cancer. If you are newly diagnosed and want to be matched to a survivor, or if you are a survivor looking to be a mentor, contact SoulMates at **617-632-6501**.

## Metastatic Breast Cancer Support Group

**Liz Farrell, MSW, LISCW | Monthly, 11 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.**

For women of all ages living with metastatic breast cancer. For more information or to register, please email [youngandstrong@partners.org](mailto:youngandstrong@partners.org).

## Facing Forward

**Ashley Boyd Fermin, MSW, LCSW**

A six-session series held twice yearly for patients who have recently completed early-stage (0-III) breast cancer treatment. For more information, email [youngandstrong@partners.org](mailto:youngandstrong@partners.org).

## Young Women's Telephone Support Group

**Megan Donovan, MSW, LCSW**

These weekly group calls, facilitated by a breast oncology social worker, give young patients and survivors an opportunity to discuss topics relevant to young women with breast cancer. This group is best suited to women who were diagnosed with stage 0-III breast cancer before age 45 and are within 12 months of the diagnosis. If you're interested in registering for the next cohort, please e-mail [youngandstrong@partners.org](mailto:youngandstrong@partners.org) or call **617-632-3916** for more information.

# A Note From the Young and Strong Team

We would like to take a moment to express our deepest gratitude and appreciation for each of you. As we all know, this last year has been anything but ordinary. We all have been thrown far outside of our comfort zones and faced down mountain-sized uncertainty. Throughout this time, one thing has for sure been certain – we need each other. We need community. We need support.

Since our very start, Young and Strong has been designed to combat isolation – intended to bring young women with breast cancer together so that no one is alone. Well, we could never do that without your participation. We design our programming to include content that is relevant to you; we provide opportunities for you to meet and connect with one another so that you can build your own long-lasting relationships. We acknowledge that it takes a great deal of bravery to show up to these programs (in person or virtually) and meet a group of strangers – authentically, in your most raw and honest form. But you do it. You show up. And in showing up for yourself, you also provide exactly what the other women are searching for: connection, understanding, and support. Thank you.

In our year ahead, despite continued uncertainties, we will continue to meet virtually. We will gather to learn together and to continue building strong and lasting friendships. For updates on future programming, please keep an eye out for our monthly e-newsletters. All information on what is available and how to join will be shared through that platform. If you are not already receiving our monthly e-newsletters, please email [youngandstrong@partners.org](mailto:youngandstrong@partners.org) and we will add you to our distribution list.

Last, but certainly not least, this is a program designed uniquely for you. If there is content you'd like addressed in future programming, please email us to let us know. We always welcome your feedback; we truly are here for you.



*Sarah Desmarais, Young and Strong program coordinator (left), and Kathryn Rigby, MEd, MSW, program manager*