Fatigue is the most common symptom reported by cancer survivors and can persist after treatment completion. Breast cancer survivors report a higher prevalence of fatigue than their peers with no cancer history (Broeckel, Jacobsen, Horton, Balducci, & Lyman, 1998; Jacobsen et al., 1999; Servaes, Verhagen, & Bleijenberg, 2002b; Stone, Richards, A’Hern, & Hardy, 2000), which persist well after the immediate period following treatment. Estimates of fatigue from a limited number of studies report that about 33% of women 5–15 years after diagnosis still list fatigue as a bothersome symptom (Bower et al., 2006; Broeckel et al.); however, these studies were in breast cancer survivors across a wide age range.

Women older than age 60 constitute the largest group of U.S. breast cancer survivors (American Cancer Society, 2008), yet the prevalence of fatigue in older breast cancer survivors has not yet been well described. To date, two studies have assessed symptoms in older breast cancer survivors specifically by comparing breast cancer survivors to age-matched peers with no history of cancer. Results of these studies conflict, with one study reporting no difference in symptoms between groups (Heidrich, Egan, Hengudomsu, & Randolph, 2006) and the other reporting that older breast cancer survivors had more days affected by fatigue than a comparison group (Robb et al., 2007). As the proportion of older adults in the United States rises dramatically in the coming decades, understanding the long-term health impact of cancer treatment in the older cancer survivor will be increasingly important.

Key Points . . .

- The prevalence of and contributors to persistent fatigue symptoms in older breast cancer survivors are understudied.
- A low level of fatigue may persist among older breast cancer survivors.
- Fatigue appears to be related to physical inactivity and lower-extremity muscle weakness, yet whether fatigue affects activity and strength or whether inactivity and weakness contribute to fatigue remains unclear.
- Physical activity holds promise as a remedy to the persistent fatigue experienced by older breast cancer survivors.

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