

After all the treatment – what next?



Once breast surgery is over and the radiation and/or chemotherapy has finished, suddenly breast cancer survivors are “on their own”, facing the sometimes daunting task of reconstructing the rest of their lives. It is a jolting change of pace for many, switching from a whirlwind of medically driven activity to suddenly being in charge of rebuilding their health, their fitness and their lives.

Being able to do all those things in the company of others who have travelled the same path helps to restore the confidence, the spark and the sense of adventure needed to permit a full and active life despite the breast cancer. That’s a great time to investigate Dragons Abreast Australia!

You could say we are the “loony fringe” of dragon-boating as a sport. We are more about participation and inclusiveness than competition. We even have a special rule which is unavailable to the sporting teams - we each only do as much or as little as we feel up to and when a paddler needs a rest, she (or he) can just stop paddling for a bit - even in a race. So, no we don’t often win any races - sometimes we’re a bit like that Olympic swimmer, Eric Musumbani, and like they did for him, the crowd generally cheers us on.

So if you are living with Breast Cancer then there is a silver lining! You can join in the fun and paddle with us. Most teams have regular introductory paddle sessions, so you can come and try it and see if dragonboating is for you. It’s a great way to regain your fitness at your own pace and in a friendly, supportive environment. To find your nearest group, phone 1 300 889 566 or email us on contact@dragonsabreast.com.au .



Background

It seems unbelievable now, but as recently as 1996, the prevailing medical wisdom worldwide was that women who’d had breast surgery should not participate in upper body exercise - it was assumed this would cause and/or aggravate complications like lymphoedema.

A Canadian physician, Prof. Don McKenzie, challenged this belief and started training a small team of breast cancer survivors to paddle dragon boats. His subsequent paper, published in the Journal of the Canadian Medical Association, established that dragon boating post-breast cancer surgery does not impact on the incidence or severity of lymphoedema. Instead it

improves the general strength, health and well-being of breast cancer survivors and so is highly appropriate in a patient’s ongoing management.

There are now over 50 breast cancer survivor teams worldwide and the movement is expanding rapidly. Here in Australia there we have over 1,200 women paddling with Dragons Abreast Australia teams in 31 clubs. Sydney was the last capital city in Australia to start a Dragons Abreast Australia team - we only took to the water in early 2003.

Recently a vacationing Canadian breast cancer survivor paddler contacted the Sydney team to see if she could come along for a paddle - she said that her team in Calgary, Alberta (population only 800,000) has over 100 survivor paddlers. In Sydney, a city with some four million people, we have nowhere near that ratio of paddlers yet but hopefully numbers will snowball as the word spreads - we have a long way to go!

Why do we paddle?



We paddle to demonstrate there is quality of life despite a breast cancer diagnosis. By being part of the team we help each other regain that sense of wellness, self-confidence and control in our lives. Although physically demanding, being involved in a dragon boat creates a new state of awareness. It is exhilarating and lots of fun. It promotes teamwork and at the same time helps overcome the isolation that a diagnosis of breast cancer can often bring. It gives participants a deep sense of pride in their accomplishments as they feel themselves become fitter and stronger with the passing weeks. Whilst not intended as a support group, friendships made in Dragons Abreast Australia provide a unique support network at a grass roots level for people with breast cancer.

Yes we compete in dragon boat regattas, but our race is against breast cancer. We are proud that our presence, wherever we go, gives a “face” to the breast cancer statistics and in so doing we actively promote breast cancer awareness in the wider community.

Who are our paddlers?

We come in all shapes, sizes, and ages (our oldest is 71 and our youngest is 21) and many of us haven't done any sport since we left school. What we all share is that we are all living with breast cancer. Sporting prowess is not one of our criteria for participation - we welcome all comers.

To find your nearest group or to be on our mailing list phone 1 300 889 566 or send us an email to contact@dragonsabreast.com.au

You can also find us on our website at : www.dragonsabreast.com.au

