

The Breast Resource Center 2004 Circle of Life Group

12 women with breast cancer participated in the Circle of Life (COL), a mind/body, health and wellness program, over a four month period. COL is a process that empowers individuals to assess 12 dimensions of life, discover strengths, set intention and goals, take healthful action steps, and implement self-care practices through coaching, group support, resources and accountability.

The Breast Resource Center group participants completed 8 sessions: a 3.5 hour mini-retreat, followed by 7- 2.5 hour sessions that were held every other week, as well as a one year follow-up reunion. Participants who ranged in age from 43-74 (mean age 54) had completed initial treatment for various stages of breast cancer.

Participants completed the Perceived Stress Scale¹ (PSS) before and after the group and at the one year follow-up reunion. Participants' perceived stress scores decreased from 24-89% (mean 48%) by the end of the program. See Figure 1 for the pre, post and one year follow-up scores.

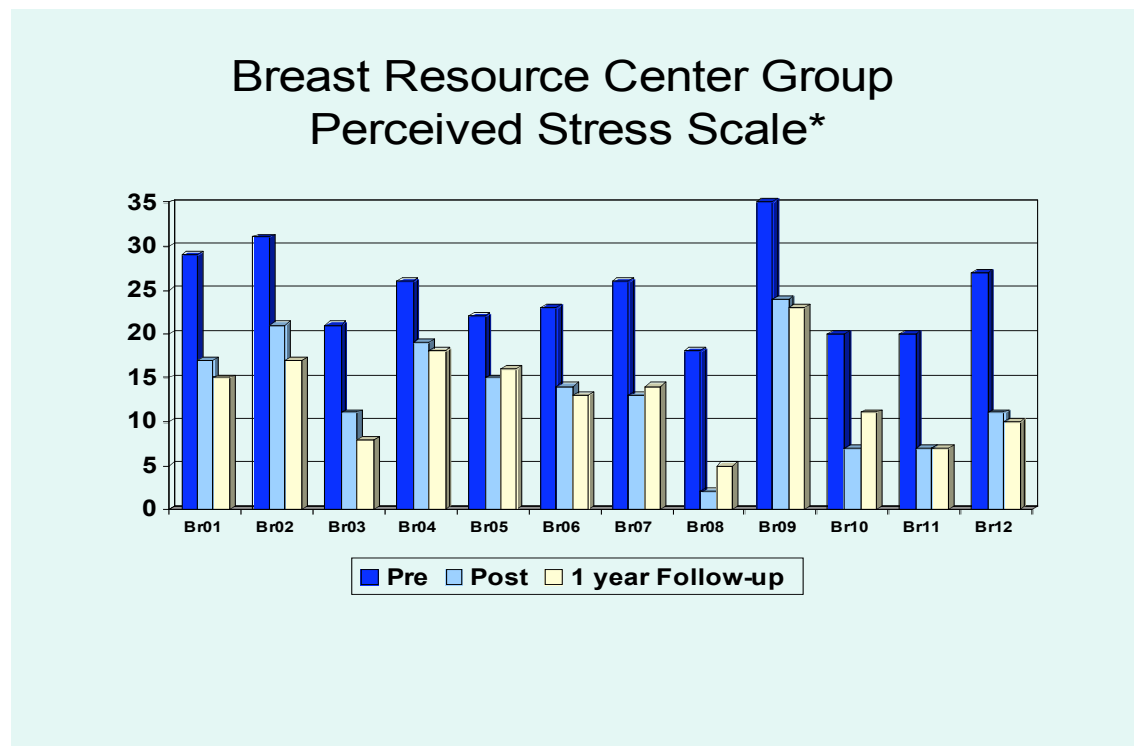


Figure 1: Perceived Stress Scale Results; Pre, Post, and 1year Follow-up

The participants' PSS scores before the COL ranged from 18-35; ninety-two percent of scores indicated a moderate level of general life stress. After completing the four month COL training all PSS scores indicated decreased life stress and ranged from 2-24. This change in scores represents a dramatic change in generalized stress in the group participants (mean 48% decrease in PSS scores).

Research indicates that stress impairs immune function^{2,3} and by decreasing generalized stress the COL group participants improved their immune function and therefore their ability to prevent illness and heal. The COL participants reported improvement in their ability to "handle their personal problems" (10/12; 83% improved) and in their ability to cope with "all the things they had to do" (9/12; 75% improved). Figure 2 shows the decrease in PSS scores after participating in the COL program.

PSS Pre and Post COL

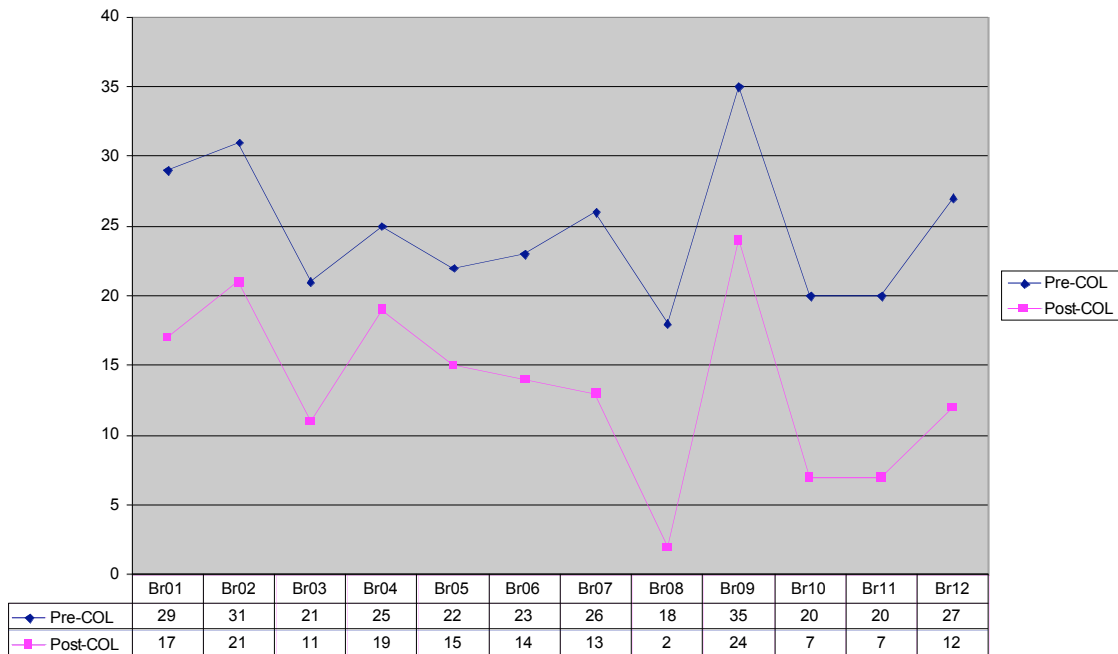


Figure 2: Change in PSS Score from Baseline

The participants were encouraged to engage an ‘accountability partner’ and continue working with the COL process after the 8 week group. Participants learned the accountability process during their group work and used it to ‘check in’ and support one another in completing action steps and reaching their goals.

Seven members of the group met every other month during the year following the group. They reinforced self-care practices, enjoyed healthy meals together and took classes, such as yoga. The group facilitator made periodic ‘check-in’ phone calls to participants.

At the one year reunion, the group members completed the PSS. All twelve participants reported continuing to use the COL process and many stated that they felt empowered to take charge of their life and health after learning and implementing the COL tools and practices. The scores are reported in Figure 3 and show that 67% of participants reported a continued improvement in their general stress level and most scores indicating mild stress level (<14).

Perceived Stress Scale Scores Post COL and 1year follow -up

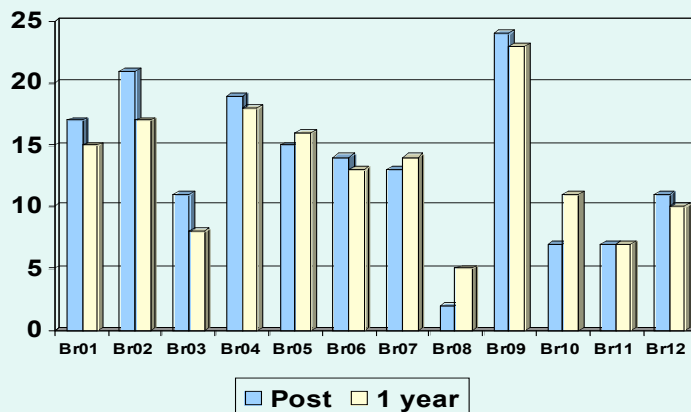


Figure 3: PSS Scores Post COL and 1Year Follow-up

One year later....

Remissions, Healing and Fulfilled Intentions

We had our one-year reunion in October 2005. Eleven of the women were in remission. One woman was in her second reoccurrence at this time. Each of the women attributes utilizing the COL process as a strong component to their remission. They also stated by staying in the COL process they are able to continue to make and sustain positive lifestyle changes, improve self-care, reduce stress, and enhance health and wellness.

Testimonials from the group*:

- Carol states that she is cancer free and fulfilled her intention to heal her unresolved relationship with her mother. She states that she feels “less stressed, lighter and freer and more alive than ever.”
- Sarah said the COL process helped her to create and sustain three, one-hour self care practices which include: yoga, exercise, meditation, and her prayer/intention process. She states this has given her “greater health, less stress, remission and an inner power that permeates every aspect of her life.”
- Peggy fulfilled her intention of being cancer free and moved to work in Paris (one of her life long dreams). She states that the bonds she made in this group are strong and that she greatly benefits in continual wellness through the support of group members and using the tools learned in the COL process.

*names have been changed to protect identity

Two years later October 2006:

During follow-up calls...

All twelve women stated they had changed their lives using mind/body/spirit and health & wellness practices and through the ongoing support of other group participants from the Circle of Life Program. They continue to use the Participant Guidebook that includes COL processes and tools that they were taught during the 8 session program with each other, friends and family.

1. Cohen, S., Kamarck, T., & Mermelstein, R. (1983). A global measure of perceived stress. Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 24, 385-396.

2. Marsland, Bachen, Cohen, Rabin, and Manuck (2002) Stress, immune reactivity and susceptibility to infectious disease. Physiology & Behavior 77: 711 – 716.

3. **Herbert TB, Cohen S.** 1993. Stress and immunity in humans: a meta-analytic review. Psychosom Med. Jul-Aug;55(4):364-79.