

Strength After Breast Cancer FAQs

For Office Staff

What is Strength After Breast Cancer?

Strength After Breast Cancer (Strength ABC) is a program designed to teach breast cancer survivors that slowly progressive weightlifting performed twice weekly can reduce the onset or worsening of breast cancer-related lymphedema. Participants in the program get an evaluation with a physical or occupational therapist who is a Certified Lymphedema Therapist, exposure to a lecture called the Lymphedema Education Session (LES), and four sessions with a trainer to learn the exercise program. The trainer can either go through the LES with the breast cancer survivor one-on-one or in a group session, or direct the survivor to the LES posted on the Klose Training website. The four exercise sessions with the trainer can be one-on-one or group sessions.

Why are we doing this program?

Strength ABC was chosen because of the positive outcomes demonstrated by the PAL trial, a large clinical trial conducted at the Perelman School of Medicine, University of Pennsylvania, composed of 154 BrCA survivors WITHOUT lymphedema and 141 BrCA survivors WITH lymphedema. Women who participated showed these benefits:

- 50% reduced likelihood of lymphedema worsening
- 70% reduced likelihood of lymphedema onset among women with 5 or more nodes removed
- Improved strength and energy
- Improved body image
- Reduced body fat
- Prevented declines in physical function that can occur after breast cancer

The current Strength ABC program was developed by the PAL researchers to put the PAL intervention into practice.

Who is eligible for Strength ABC?

1. Individuals who have had breast cancer. Most will have finished treatment, but patients still in treatment can be evaluated to see if they are ready. Patients who have recently had surgery will need to be cleared for 'usual activity' by their surgeon.
2. BrCA survivors with or without lymphedema.
3. BrCA survivors who have no medical conditions that would preclude participation in a weight-training program.
4. Currently free of cancer (not metastatic)

What do I do at the initial phone call?

All patients must be scheduled for an evaluation with a physical or occupational therapist who is a Certified Lymphedema Therapist (CLT) before beginning Strength ABC. This is true even if the patient does *not* have lymphedema. They can be scheduled with a PT/OT, CLT in one setting and then do the other 5 sessions (LES + 4 training sessions) at another location.

Commonly asked questions:

Q: The patient asks to be scheduled for the exercise classes but hasn't had an evaluation yet.

A: You **cannot** schedule her for the exercise classes without an evaluation.

Q: The patient wants to know when the next session of classes will start. She wants to get an evaluation ASAP so she can get into classes.

A: 1. Do your best to get her an appointment.

2. Offer her another location with a PT/OT, CLT.

3. Advise her that a new set of classes will start soon.

4. Let her know that a PT/OT, CLT must evaluate her and will be working with her to decide on the best plan for her treatment. Not all patients are ready for the Strength ABC program when they come to their evaluation.

Q: Do BrCA survivors need a prescription for this program when it is offered in the setting of physical or occupational therapy?

A: Yes – just like any other treatment.

Q: Can we get the prescription from the electronic medical record if the patient is sure the doctor put one in?

A: That depends on your system. Your administrators will need to check if this is an option.

Is this an insurance-based program?

Yes. Follow all the same rules with this program as with other patients. Patients must pay any co-pays or deductibles as per their insurance. If they have an HMO and are not capped to your organization, they can receive treatment with you for their lymphedema-related issues out of capitation.

What if we don't take their insurance, or they don't have insurance?

Each clinic/healthcare system will need to decide how to deal with this individually.

The Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania has a direct-pay option for this program. As of March, 2015, the evaluation costs \$229. When the LES and exercise sessions are offered in groups of up to 6 people, each group-based session costs \$37.50. The self-pay rate for one-on-one sessions for the LES and exercise sessions is \$150.

Be sure that patients are made aware that the charge for group sessions only applies if they participate in group sessions. If there are not enough patients to participate and they are placed one-on-one with the therapist, they need to be charged the regular self-pay rate, or they can go through their insurance and be billed the appropriate one-on-one codes, or they can opt to wait for another patient to participate, or they can go to another clinic that has groups.

How do I schedule return appointments?

As delivered at Penn, the program has 5 group-based sessions. At Penn they are called:

1. LES-SABC
2. 1 SABC Exercise
3. 2 SABC Exercise
4. 3 SABC Exercise
5. 4 SABC Exercise

How do I know when the classes are offered?

Your manager/office manager should give you the schedule of classes.

Do patients need to do the classes in order?

They must do the exercise classes in order. It is preferred that they do the Lymphedema Education Session (LES) before they start the exercise classes.

What if a patient can't make one class (ex. 2 SABC- Exercise)? Can I schedule them for the rest of the classes?

You need to talk to their therapist about how to handle these specific situations. The answer will be different depending on the patient, therapist, and location. The therapist may be able to see them individually to cover the material in the class they missed.

Can they take the classes at a different location?

Yes, they can take the classes at any location where they are offered in a given health system. They need to stick with one location once they start the group sessions because it will improve the quality of their experience.

To whom should I direct the patients if they have more questions about the program?

Provide them with contact information for the Strength ABC administrator:

- Name of administrator
- Email address
- Phone Number