



Robert A. Sabo/The Journal News

Annie Toglia of Bronxville is a physical trainer and medical-exercise specialist who is also a breast-cancer survivor. She has written "Staying Abreast," with exercises breast-cancer patients can do during and after treatment.

*A breast-cancer survivor shares her path to ...*

# empowerment

Linda Lombroso  
The Journal News

**F**rom the moment she had her first mastectomy, Annie Toglia knew she had to write a book. Not a novel or a memoir or a doctor-driven medical guide, but a volume that was noticeably absent from bookstore shelves: a do-it-yourself rehabilitative exercise program designed specifically for women recovering from breast-cancer surgery. And what better person to write it than a medical-exercise specialist, physical trainer and dance educator who'd gone through it herself?

Certainly, from the patient's perspective, Toglia has seen it all. Since her initial diagnosis of breast cancer in 1996, she's had two mastectomies (one with reconstruction and the other — a prophylactic procedure — followed by an implant), numerous courses of chemotherapy, stem-cell transplants and vaccine treatments. But from the start of the journey, even as she pushed her intravenous

pole through the hallways of St. Agnes Hospital in White Plains, Toglia knew that exercise would be the key to her recovery — and that the proper techniques could help countless other patients going through the same ordeal.

"Most doctors don't tell you how to exercise," says Toglia, pacing her Bronxville apartment with the ramrod-straight posture of a dancer, amid copies of her recently published book, "Staying Abreast: Rehabilitation Exercises for Breast Cancer Surgery." "I felt I had such a background in this whole area of sports medicine that I kept thinking as I was going through my physical therapy. As I would do an exercise, I would go back to my memory bank and think of a stretch I learned in dance."

Yet she soon realized that everything had changed, and that her old exercises would have to be redesigned if she wanted to continue working out. "My body was a completely different body. I had to find a new posture, new ways of lifting things, new ways

of opening doors," says Toglia, demonstrating the hunched-over posture that's common among women who've just had a mastectomy. Unfortunately, she says, the existing exercises for breast-cancer patients were limited to such simple tasks as walking the fingers up the wall — "too rudimentary and not really expansive enough."

That has long been apparent to Dr. Anthony Cahan, a breast surgeon at St. Agnes and New York Presbyterian hospitals, and physician-in-charge at Beth Israel's Robert and Helen Appel Comprehensive Breast Service, who served as a consultant for "Staying Abreast." "There are tons of very simple post-mastectomy exercises, but they only focus on the shoulder," he says. "Annie's book is the first of its kind that, in an intelligent and professional way, sets out a whole format for a woman to regain not only upper-extremity strength and mobility but the entire health of her whole body."

# Building strength

EXERCISE, from 1E

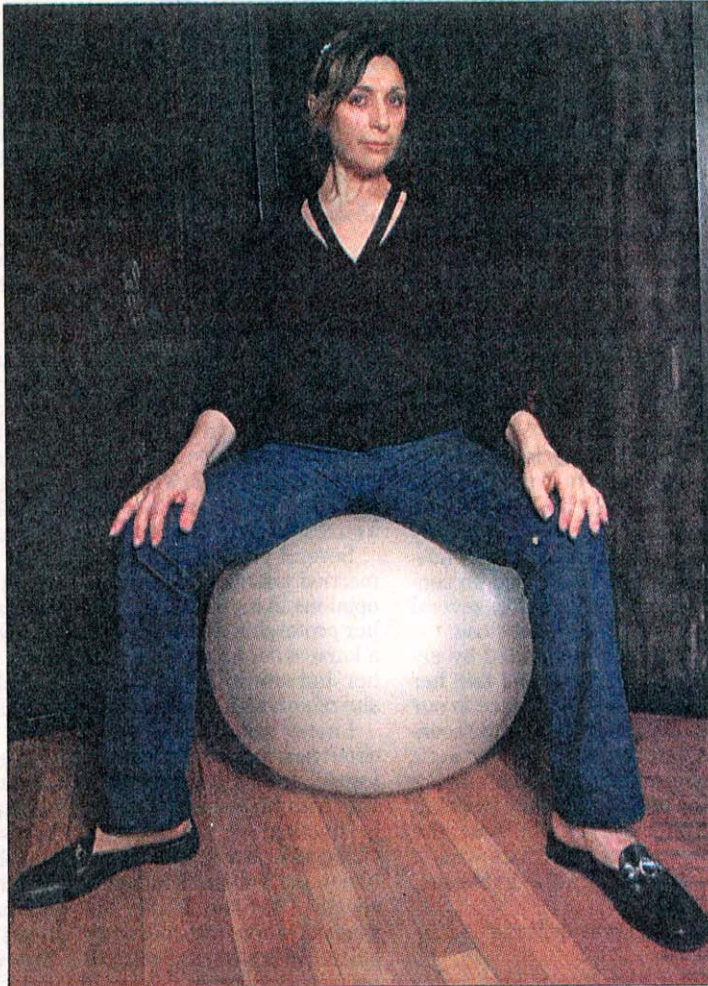
The book, designed to be used by patients after consulting with their physicians, contains exercises geared for every stage of recovery — and includes a section with special exercises for women still going through chemotherapy, radiation or hormone therapy. Its focus on improving the quality of life for cancer patients is what makes it unique, says Cindy Teeple, an oncology nurse practitioner and clinical nurse specialist who works with Westchester-based medical-research oncologist Dr. Abraham Mittelman.

"Annie's book is right on target," she says. "Years ago, we used to tell cancer patients to go to bed and take a nap. We don't do that anymore. We try to keep them as active as possible and try to maintain their activities of normal living."

For Toglia, life has become a whirl of ringing telephones, buzzing doorbells and floods of e-mail — all related to the book and its Web site ([www.stayingabreast.com](http://www.stayingabreast.com)). But she is quick to point out that "Staying Abreast" would never have taken shape without the help of countless friends and relatives. The book, she says, is a collaborative effort. Photographer Steven Klein, a close friend, contributed his photo of Kate Moss for the cover; Pascal Danguin of Box Studio designed the cover free of charge; illustrator Loren Mack was paid only for the first 12 drawings; and a cousin of Toglia's who owns Print Craft in Mamaroneck, printed the book's 1,000 copies free.

The book has been donated to Beth Israel, Roosevelt and St. Luke's hospitals in Manhattan, and to cancer centers in Cleveland and Minneapolis. And it is slowly making its way to breast-cancer patients who don't have easy access to physical therapists. These include a small-town seamstress whose work requires her to drag around heavy bolts of fabric — after a mastectomy that included removal of the lymph nodes and has caused swelling in her arm and hand. "This woman wrote to me from West Virginia," says Toglia, "and she said to me, 'I just want to thank you so much for a shoulder to lean on.'"

Clearly, it's a job Toglia takes seriously. She corresponds with readers who've seen the book or visited the Web site ("I've been



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Physical-trainer Annie Toglia's new book is "Staying Abreast."

## More about "Staying Abreast"

"Staying Abreast: Rehabilitation Exercises for Breast Cancer Surgery" costs \$55, including shipping. It can be ordered through the book's Web site ([www.stayingabreast.com](http://www.stayingabreast.com)) or directly from Annie Toglia at 1470 Midland Ave., Apt. 2-0, Bronxville, N.Y. 10708. 914-237-1779. Toglia also wel-

comes e-mail at [walker11@optonline.net](mailto:walker11@optonline.net).

Annie Toglia will speak about the Staying Abreast program at 6 p.m. May 15 at Beth Israel Cancer Center, 10 Union Square East, Manhattan. 212-844-8468.

She will also appear on WFAS-AM radio (1230 on the dial), on Dr. Harris Stratyner's "Here's to Your Good Health" program, at 8 a.m. May 18.

getting beautiful thank-you letters, and I'm keeping them all"). She's at work on a companion video, and she's already planning a follow-up to "Staying Abreast." Her mission, she says, is to make sure that all breast-cancer patients are prescribed physical therapy and exercise, since she believes that patients who find the will to exercise will find the strength to fight their disease.

"One of my doctors said to me, 'Annie, if you could do one thing, package your hope and share that

with people.'"

Toglia hopes she's done just that.

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