

Meet Carla Vercoe, Peak Pilates® MI and Breast Cancer Survivor

In honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Peak Pilates® MI and breast cancer survivor Carla Vercoe shares her inspiring story.

Breast cancer [affects nearly 12% of women](#) (about 1 in 8) in the United States alone. Early detection of the disease is vital because it does not discriminate and doesn't necessarily result from life choices. The diagnosis came unexpectedly for Carla Vercoe, a Peak Pilates® Master Instructor and a revered leader in the Pilates community.

"The first reaction to my diagnosis was a fear so strong it took my breath away," Carla says. In September 2015, she found a lump in her breast following a self-examination. Thankfully, she has always been proactive about her health and sought treatment with her OB/GYN immediately. After an excisional biopsy around the Thanksgiving holiday, her surgeon broke the painful news.

"After the fear came disbelief. I'm healthy. I'm vegan. I exercise daily. I don't eat gluten. I drink alcohol only occasionally. I don't use deodorant. How could I have breast cancer? It must be a mistake."



When her insurance would not cover non-traditional treatment options, her friend Shelly chose to conduct what became a successful GoFundMe campaign that enabled Carla to travel and complete the needed treatments. She relates the process to that of a butterfly's transformation, evolving from scared and helpless to confident and hopeful.

Thankfully, Carla had the support of her family and friends to assist with her research and to help her decide on treatment options. She ultimately decided to forgo regular chemotherapy and instead chose a non-traditional treatment option. With lots of research under her belt, she found a doctor in Florida that would administer these alternative treatments in a safe and encouraging manner and began the required weekly travel to Florida and back home to Virginia.

"I leaned on my friends for emotional support. I wanted to stay strong for my husband and my son, so I put on a brave face for them until I finally broke down one evening... They only offered love and support and comforted me until I could breathe evenly again. I sought out healers and self-help practitioners to help me deal with my diagnosis."

"The most challenging moment for me was making the decision to choose a non-conventional route and follow my heart and soul and go with alternative treatment," she says. "Once I made that decision, I had to share it with friends and family. Some were supportive and some weren't. I realized I could only surround myself with people that supported my decision. That ended up being everyone that loved me. Some may not have agreed with me, but they all supported me."

Carla also relied on her Pilates practice and the nurturing environment of her studio. She explains that her initial chemotherapy treatments left her feeling drained and dejected. Fortunately, her Pilates training turned out to be invaluable throughout her treatment.

“Pilates was my lifeline; not just the exercise, but being in my studio. I knew I wasn’t the type to hide while having treatment... I needed to be at work. I needed to be with my staff. I needed to be with my friends. I needed to teach and I needed to practice. I practiced before my mastectomy, and was practicing again about 3 weeks after. I knew enough about Pilates and my body to know what I could and could not do. My doctors all said they wished all their patients were as healthy and strong as me. I can’t express enough how important Pilates was during and after treatment, and before and after surgery!”

Now cancer free, Carla stays vigilant about her supplements and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. “My biggest changes are in the way I look at life and how I chose to live my life,” she adds. “I practice loving everyone and keeping a positive attitude about everything. I chose to simplify my life by downsizing my studio and focusing on adding women’s wellness retreats to my business offerings.”



Carla encourages everyone to follow their heart when faced with struggles such as a breast cancer diagnosis. She notes that she shares everything with her friends, family, and strangers, but acknowledges that others may prefer to keep their health and treatment private. Regardless, she urges

those who either are or those who know someone diagnosed with breast cancer to follow their intuition and never be afraid to ask for help from family and friends.

“Know that there is no right or wrong way to deal with or accept your diagnosis,” Carla concludes. “Just know that you are not alone and never hesitate to reach out and ask for help... Whatever you believe in and choose to do is right for you. Don’t let anyone else make your decisions for you. As long as you believe in your treatment, you will be successful. You are strong and your body has the ability to heal. Meditate, pray, love and accept.”

We encourage you to contribute to the [Breast Cancer Research Foundation](#) to help bring an end to this disease. You can also share your stories of battle and survival on the [Peak Pilates® Facebook](#) page.