

Background

- Unintentional weight loss (WL) can be a disruptive symptom of cancer, a sign of disease, and a side effect of treatment, yet its psychosocial impact is not well understood.

Aims

- The objective of this study was to examine cancer survivors' experiences with and impact of unintentional weight loss.

Methods

- 320 cancer survivors completed an online survey, provided demographic, health, and unintentional WL history, and rated (0=Not at all; 4=Extremely) 19 statements about WL outcomes.
- 55 participants (17%) reported unintentional WL** in the past 6 months; statistical analyses focused on this subset of participants.*
- Discrepancies in self-description of weight vs. BMI-derived weight classification were compared using Cohen's Kappa; associations between WL beliefs and self-description of weight were assessed using ANOVA and pairwise post-hoc analyses.

Participants

	N = 55	Mean / n	SD / %
Age (years)		59.6	11
		Range: 32 – 86	
Non-Hispanic White		45	87%
Female		45	82%
Diagnosis			
Breast		18	33%
Leukemia		7	13%
Multiple Myeloma		5	9%
Lymphoma		4	7%
Lung		3	6%
Ovarian		2	4%
Colorectal		2	4%
Time since diagnosis (years)		5.5	5
		Range: 0 – 22	
Current disease status			
Metastatic		9	17%
Recurrence/relapse		16	29%
Remission		21	38%
Treatment History			
Surgery		35	78%
Chemotherapy (past / current)		38 / 17	79% / 46%
Radiation therapy (past / current)		25 / 3	56% / 9%
Hormonal therapy (past / current)		10 / 8	29% / 24%
BMI		27.6	6.3
Amount of unintentional WL (pounds)		16.4	16.8
		Range: 2-70	

*Note: Participants experiencing unintentional WL (N=55) were less likely to be in disease remission (p<.05) when compared to other participants who completed the survey (N=265), but did not differ on other sociodemographic or clinical history variables.

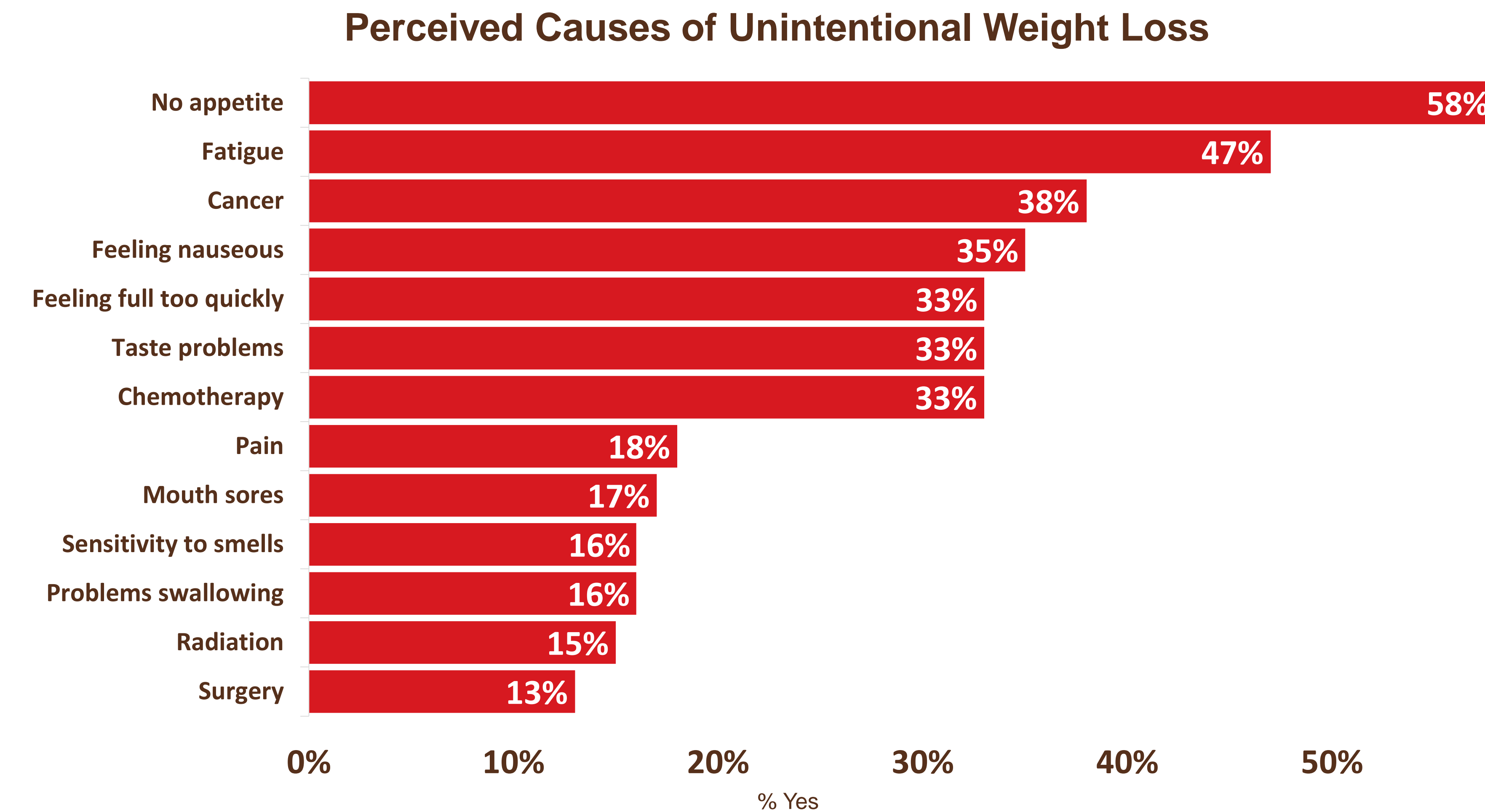
Acknowledgments

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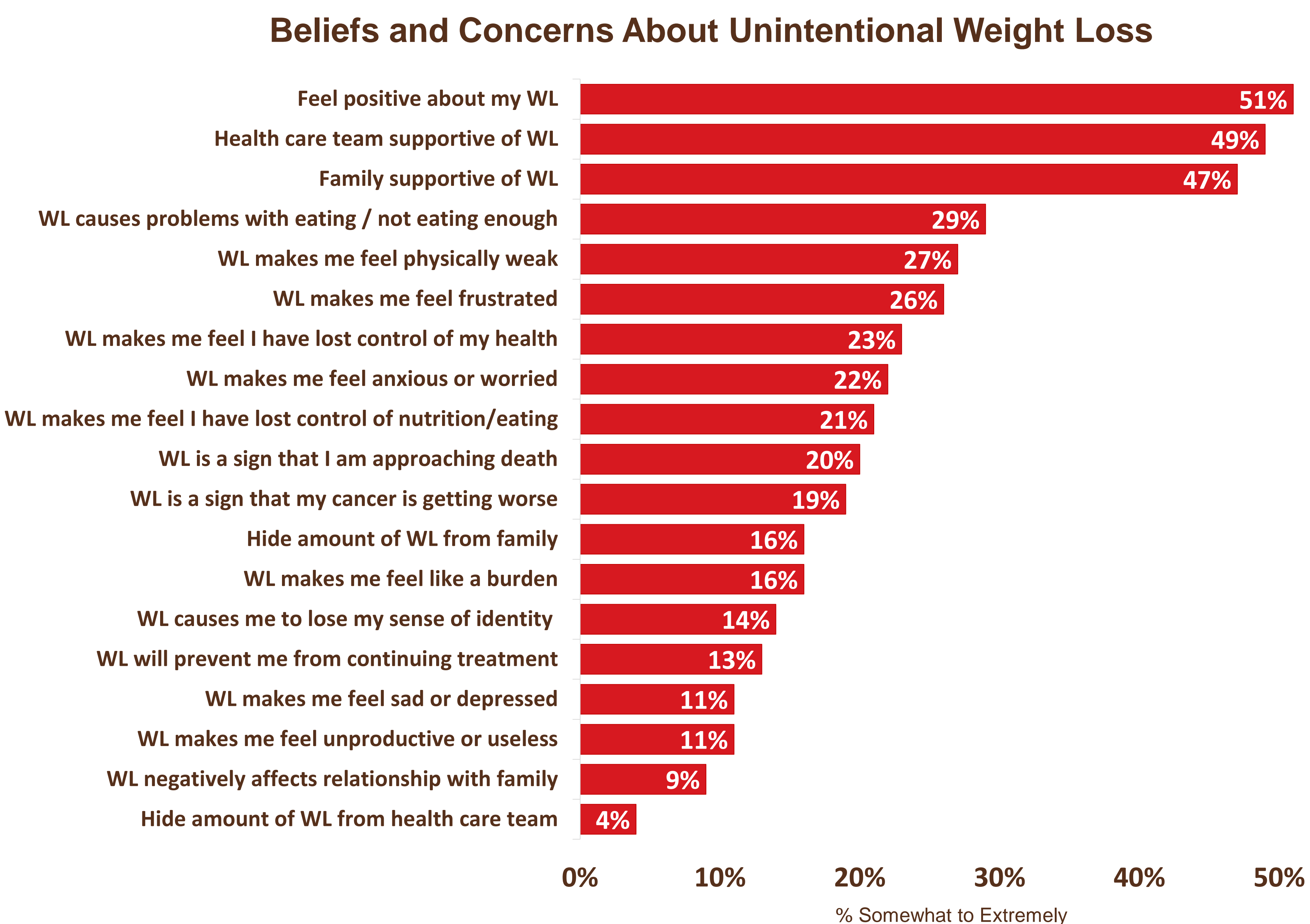
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Results



- Of those experiencing unintentional WL in the past 6 months, more than half (58%) attributed their WL to lack of appetite and nearly half (47%) believed their WL was due to fatigue.
- About one-third of participants attributed their unintentional WL to their cancer (38%), problems with nausea (35%), feeling full too quickly (33%), problems with taste (33%), and chemotherapy (33%).



- Views about unintentional WL varied, with substantial proportions of participants reporting concerns about the impact of WL on their physical and emotional well-being and on relationships.

Self-Description of Weight vs. BMI-Based Weight Classification

How would you describe your current weight?

	Underweight	Normal Weight	Overweight	Obese	Total
BMI-Based Weight Classification					
Underweight	4	1	0	0	5
Normal Weight	6	14	3	0	23
Overweight	0	3	5	0	8
Obese	0	0	9	3	12
Total	10	18	17	3	48

- Participants with unintentional WL tended to underestimate their weight classification, with 38% of all respondents using a weight description falling below the one indicated by their BMI.
- Of BMI-classified *healthy* weight participants, 26% called themselves *underweight*, $\kappa=-.17$, $p<.01$.

Weight Loss Beliefs and Concerns Vary by Self-Description of Weight

	% Somewhat to Extremely
More strongly endorsed by people describing themselves as overweight:	
<i>I feel positive about my weight loss</i>	51%
<i>My health care team is supportive of the weight I have lost</i>	49%
More strongly endorsed by people describing themselves as underweight:	
<i>My WL causes me to feel physically weak</i>	27%
<i>My WL makes me feel I have lost control over my nutrition and eating</i>	23%
<i>My WL makes me feel like a burden to others</i>	16%
<i>My WL causes me to lose my sense of identity</i>	14%
Views did not differ by perceived weight status:	
<i>I believe that my WL is a sign that I am approaching end of life or death</i>	20%
<i>My WL will prevent me from continuing with cancer treatments</i>	13%

- Views about weight loss tended to differ statistically by self-description of weight ($ps<.05$) but not by BMI-derived weight classification.
- Participants who viewed themselves as underweight were more likely to endorse negative concerns about their unintentional WL, while participants who viewed themselves as overweight tended to feel positive about unintentional WL.

Implications and Conclusions

- Many cancer survivors experience unintentional weight loss and associate their weight loss with negative outcomes.
- Survivors also often underestimate their weight classification, which is notable given that personal views of one's weight status, not BMI-based weight status, is associated with beliefs about the impact of unintentional weight loss.
- While significant medical attention is given to cancer survivors' documented weight loss, more focus needs to be given to patients' and survivors' perceptions of their weight (with particular attention to individuals who describe themselves as underweight) to facilitate meaningful conversations with the health care team and referrals to allied health professionals as appropriate.