



After a Breast Cancer Diagnosis

If you have been told you have breast cancer, you have probably already had a mammogram, other scans, and a biopsy (a test that takes some tissue to check for cancer). Other tests might have been done on the cancer cells to check for certain proteins and gene changes. You might also have more scans or other procedures to find out if the cancer has spread. These tests help your doctor know what type of breast cancer you have, what stage it is, and what treatment might help.

There are many ways to treat breast cancer, including surgery, radiation, and medicines such as chemo, hormone therapy, targeted drug therapy, or immunotherapy. Many times, more than one type of treatment is needed. Treatment mostly depends on the type and stage of your breast cancer. Your treatment choices also depend on the results of the tests on the cancer cells, health problems you might have, if you have gone through menopause, and your personal choices.

It's important to know some treatments can cause changes in menstrual periods and can make it hard for you to get pregnant. By talking about this early before your treatment starts, your doctor can help you decide which treatments are best for you and what can be done to protect your ability to have children.

Be sure to ask:

- What type of breast cancer do I have?
- What stage is my breast cancer, and what does that mean?
- What else have you learned about my breast cancer from my test results?
- Will I need more tests?

- What treatments do you think are best for my breast cancer?
- What are the likely side effects from treatment?
- Will the treatment affect my ability to have children? Is there anything that can help with this?

What to expect during treatment

Your cancer care team will explain your treatment plan to you. This team may include different doctors, nurses, and other health care workers, depending on the type of treatment you need. For example, if you need a procedure to help protect your fertility, certain specialists will help you understand what to expect. Or, if you need surgery, you will work with your surgeon to know what to expect before and after the operation. If you need other types of treatment, your doctor or cancer care team will explain how it is given, help you get ready for it, keep track of how you're doing, and help you with any side effects. You might also get blood tests, x-rays, or scans at certain times to see how well your treatment is working.

Not everyone going through treatment for breast cancer will have the same side effects. For example, the side effects of surgery are different from the side

effects of chemo, hormone therapy, targeted therapy, immunotherapy, or radiation treatments. And people getting the same treatment might have different side effects. It's also important to know if you need to use birth control during treatment.

Be sure to ask:

- What are my treatment options? What do you think is best for me and why?
- What is the goal of treatment?
- What side effects might I have, and what can I do about them?
- How will we know if the treatment is working?
- How often will I get treatment, and how long will it last?
- Where will I go to get treatment, and can I drive myself?
- Will I be able to keep doing my usual activities, like work, exercise, and having sex?
- Do I need to use birth control during treatment?

What to expect after treatment

After treatment, your cancer care team will help you deal with any side effects you might still have. You will also have regular tests to check if your cancer has come back, or to check if a new cancer has started in a different part of your body.

For some people, the cancer might not go away completely. They might continue to get treatment, and tests will still be needed to see how well it's working.

Be sure to tell your doctor or someone on the cancer care team if you have side effects that don't go away after treatment or any new symptoms.

You might also have a hard time coping with changes to your body after treatment. For example, you might have lost all or part of a breast after surgery or have skin changes from radiation. If this is a concern, talk to your cancer care team about what options are available to help you cope.

You might also have menstrual changes, not be able to get pregnant, or have scars from surgery. Talk to your cancer care team about when you might be able to try to get pregnant. If you have had a procedure to help keep your fertility, talk with your cancer care team about the need for using birth control and getting help with family planning.

It is important to know that taking hormone replacement therapy to help with menopause symptoms is often not safe for women who have had breast cancer. If you are bothered by menopause symptoms, talk to your doctor about ways to get relief.

Even if you've finished treatment and may feel fine, it is important to ask your cancer care team about a regular schedule for follow-up tests to check if breast cancer has come back.

Be sure to ask:

- How often do I need to see my cancer care team?
- Will I need tests to see if the cancer has come back, or to check for problems from my treatment?
- Do I need any screening tests, like a colonoscopy, to find other common cancers early?
- Do I need a follow-up plan after treatment?
- Do I need to use birth control after treatment?
- How and when will I know if I can still get pregnant after my treatment is done?
- Are there any late or long-term side effects from treatment I should watch for?
- When and how should I contact my cancer care team?
- Where can I find my medical records after treatment?

Staying healthy

There are things you can do to keep yourself healthy during and after treatment for breast cancer. Eating well, being active, getting to and staying at a healthy weight, not smoking, and avoiding alcohol can help you. Some of these things might also help lower your risk of getting a new breast cancer or other cancers.

Remember to get screened for other kinds of cancers and continue getting checked for other health problems. Talk to your doctor about the screening and testing plan that's right for you.

Dealing with your feelings

Having breast cancer might make you feel scared, sad, or nervous. You might also have a hard time coping with changes to your fertility and changes to your body after treatment. For example, you might have lost hair after chemo, or a part or all of a breast after surgery. It is normal to have these feelings, and there are ways to help you cope with them.

- Don't try to deal with your feelings by yourself. Talk about your feelings, no matter what they are.
- It's OK to feel sad or down once in a while, but let your cancer care team know if you have these feelings for more than a few days.
- Do things you enjoy like going to a movie, out to dinner, spending time outdoors, or to a sporting event, if your doctor says it's OK.
- Get help with tasks like cooking and cleaning.

You might want to reach out to friends, family, or religious leaders or groups. Some people find it helpful to talk with others who've been through the same things. A support group can offer that. Others might be helped by getting counseling. Tell your cancer care team how you are feeling. They can help you find the right support.

For cancer information, day-to-day help, and support, call the American Cancer Society at **1-800-227-2345** or visit us online at cancer.org/breastcancer. We're here when you need us.

