

Coping with breast cancer

A breast cancer diagnosis can cause a wide range of feelings. Denial, guilt, helplessness, anxiety and fear are all normal. It is a stressful time. That is why it helps to build a strong support network of family and friends. Make time to share your feelings with others.

Co-survivors can be family, friends, co-workers or members from your health care team. They are there to help:

- Lend support from diagnosis through treatment and beyond,
- With day-to-day tasks, and
- Gather information about breast cancer.

A social worker or counselor can also help with a wide range of issues with breast cancer. They can also help you cope with financial concerns.

Finally, talking to your doctor is one of the best things you can do. Talk openly with each other. This will help you gain trust and confidence. It will also help you work together as a team to make key treatment decisions.



Feel like you are losing control?

When told you have breast cancer, you may feel like you have lost control of your life. You might be overwhelmed by the decisions you have to make. These feelings are normal. Do not let them keep you from taking action though. First, learn about breast cancer at your own pace. Get information about treatment options, side effects and clinical trials. Remember, doctors can discuss options, but the final decisions should be made together.

Knowing what to expect is another way to feel in control. It may also help to keep as normal a routine as possible. Be patient. Coping with breast cancer requires time, acceptance, a fighting spirit and support. Many people also find strength in their spirituality and faith.

The positive side

Having breast cancer may feel like the worst thing that can happen to you. Yet, there may be some good things you can take away. Many survivors say that breast cancer has given them a renewed appreciation for life and for their social network. Others have made new friendships, rekindled old ones and found an inner strength that they did not know they had. This has led many people to help others cope with breast cancer. You may decide that you can help educate and support others affected by breast cancer too. Contact your local Susan G. Komen Affiliate or your local hospital to see how you can get involved.

Handling treatment

The goal of any breast cancer treatment is to get rid of the cancer and offer the best possible chance of survival.

But even the best treatments have side effects. Common side effects include fatigue, hair loss and hot flashes. Changes in physical features often lead to a change in body image. This can lead to stress and anxiety. Having a mastectomy can be very difficult. Options such as reconstruction and prostheses may help with concerns over body image.

The Reach to Recovery program sponsored by the American Cancer Society provides support to breast cancer patients from other breast cancer survivors. The Look Good...Feel Better® program helps women in treatment by giving them beauty tips and supplies to help with their self-image.

During treatment, you may need help with everyday errands or household chores. Do not be afraid to ask for help. Ask for help with grocery shopping and child care. You may also need someone to drive you to your doctors' appointments. Be clear about what you need. It will increase the chances you will get the help you need.

Resources

Organizations

Susan G. Komen®
1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636)
www.komen.org

American Cancer Society
1-800-ACS-2345
www.cancer.org

CancerCare®
1-800-813-HOPE
www.cancercare.org

Educational Materials

What's Happening to Me?
by Susan G. Komen®
www.ShopKomen.com

Questions to Ask the Doctor
by Susan G. Komen®
www.komen.org/questions

The Komen message boards offer online forums for cancer survivors to share their experiences and advice with other survivors. <https://apps.komen.org/Forums/>

Related fact sheets in this series:

- Breast Cancer Resources
- Chemotherapy and Side Effects
- Getting the Support You Need
- Radiation Therapy and Side Effects
- Talking with Your Doctor

The above list of resources is only a suggested resource and is not a complete listing of breast cancer materials or information. The information contained herein is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or to replace the services of a medical professional. Komen does not endorse, recommend or make any warranties or representations regarding the accuracy, completeness, timeliness, quality or non-infringement of any of the materials, products or information provided by the organizations referenced herein.

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