



Breast cancer: Live your life

There are everyday things you can do to make you feel better and help you get through your treatment and beyond.

It starts with tips to stay healthy, exercise, taking care of your looks, and getting back to work.

Here's some simple advice to help you cope better with breast cancer.



Eat healthy throughout your treatment

- ✧ Treatments for breast cancer can have a variety of side effects, and your eating habits and appetite may change as a result of treatment.¹
- ✧ If you can't eat regular meals, a snack may be an option. And if you don't feel like having solid food, try drinking shakes, smoothies, soups or other liquid foods.¹
- ✧ Principles for eating healthy include increasing consumption of fruits, vegetables, and whole grain, while decreasing fat intake, minimising intake of cured and smoked foods, and consuming alcohol in moderation.²
- ✧ Remember, although having good eating habits during treatment is important, do not force dietary changes on yourself too rapidly: use good judgement and adopt any changes slowly.
- ✧ Good eating habits should be part of your daily routine, which can help you feel as good as possible!


Your healthcare team is there to help you. Don't hesitate to ask for support whenever you feel the need for yourself or for your family. They will provide you with further guidance and resources in making the right decision for you.



Feel good about yourself

- ↪ Most treatments for breast cancer are associated with side effects that can affect the way you feel.³
- ↪ Exercising regularly can improve your quality of life and reduce fatigue related to cancer and its treatment. All experts agree that exercise is safe both during and after treatment.^{4,5}
- ↪ Some women find it hard to maintain an exercise routine and remain motivated. Try the following:⁶
 - Make your exercise enjoyable, for example, exercising together with friends
 - Consider doing different kinds of exercises, like walking, bike riding, yoga, etc., to add some variety
 - Don't overdo it. Exercise doesn't always have to be intense
- ↪ Remember to ask your doctor about the type of exercise that is best for you both during and after treatment.

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Understand the physical changes

- ✧ Breast cancer and its treatment can be associated with drastic changes to your body and the way you feel about yourself.⁷
- ✧ You may experience symptoms of menopause or hair loss due to your treatment. Facing these new physical changes can be difficult, but remember that many of these changes may be only temporary.^{7,8}
- ✧ It may be worthwhile to directly confront any changes to your body with the help of your partner. It will make it easier for you, your family members and your friends to gain confidence with any changes in your appearance.⁷
- ✧ Raising your concerns is a key part of your treatment.

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Stay close to your family

- ✧ Around 20% of family and friends caring for cancer patients experience distress that may lead to some form of depression, anxiety, or other psychological disorders.⁹
- ✧ A diagnosis of cancer can affect not only those with the cancer, but also close friends and family. Reactions can differ greatly: some are negative, some are positive and some family members may show no changes. These different reactions may serve as coping mechanisms. Try and be honest and talk directly with your close ones about concerns and problems that you or they are experiencing.¹⁰
- ✧ If you have children, give them realistic expectations about what they can expect from you, and how the treatment of breast cancer will affect your – and their – daily routines. This will help them to understand when you are not feeling well because of your treatment for breast cancer.¹⁰


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Intimacy: Be comfortable with your body

- ✧ Physical changes, especially after breast surgery, may make you feel less comfortable with your body. Some treatments may change your hormone levels, affecting your sexual interest and your life with your partner.¹¹
- ✧ You may experience vaginal dryness and other symptoms¹² that can make it painful to even think about having sex. Regardless of all these changes you are going through, learn to be comfortable with your body.
- ✧ Maintaining a sexual relationship may be stressful and take time. Try to be patient, give yourself and your partner enough time to feel comfortable with this new situation.¹³
- ✧ It's important that you try to maintain intimacy in the relationship. Here are some ideas: plan a getaway weekend, go out on dates, schedule romantic evenings at home, hold hands and take walks together, talk to your partner.
- ✧ Be open about how you feel and what you want. Communication is key!
- ✧ If you are of child bearing age, don't hesitate to discuss any fertility questions you have with your doctor. International guidelines even recommend to physicians to discuss this topic as early as possible.¹⁴

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At work, make the decision that feels right for you

- ✧ You might decide to tell your colleagues or your supervisor about your diagnosis. Remember that in reality, you don't need to tell anyone, except perhaps should it interfere with your ability to work. However, make the decision that feels right for you!¹⁵
- ✧ If you are motivated to return to work or are still working, an integrated approach to home, work, social activities and family can help you to improve your quality of life. It may also minimize the burden that breast cancer and its treatment may have on your life and overall well-being.
- ✧ A return to work may also help you to reconnect to ordinary life. Studies have shown that returning to work is associated with good body language, better physical functioning, better well being and regular exercise.¹⁶
- ✧ Take care of your health and create your own coping strategies than can facilitate your return to work.

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