

Coping With a New Diagnosis



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is different.**

If you have stage IV (metastatic) breast
cancer, visit Lbbc.org for resources
created just for you.



Dear Friend:

In the first days after a diagnosis of breast cancer, you are likely to have many different emotions. This is also true during the treatment that follows, and beyond. No matter how you feel, we want you to know your feelings are valid.

Over the years, thousands of people have told us they would like help navigating their emotions. Many say they wished they had a list of resources they could turn to for support during this difficult time.

In this guide, we aim to help you recognize and work through your feelings in the first days, weeks and months after a diagnosis of breast cancer. We provide guidance and practical support, and we give tips to help you ask for what you need. We also suggest steps you can take, as well as resources you can use, to move forward with your life once active treatment ends.

As you journey through breast cancer and beyond, remember that LBBC is committed to providing you with trusted information and a community of support. Together, we will help you get through this time and move forward with your life.

Warmly,

Jean A. Sachs, MSS, MLSP
Chief Executive Officer



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BREAST CANCER®**

Toll-Free Breast Cancer Helpline

lbbc.org/helpline

(888) 753-5222

All people pictured in this guide are LBBC volunteers whose lives have been affected by breast cancer. We thank them for sharing their experiences.

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Recognizing Your Feelings

After hearing you have breast cancer, you may experience a variety of emotions. You may ask yourself: “Is what I’m feeling normal?” or “Is it all right to feel the way I’m feeling?”

Each person’s response to breast cancer is different. At first, it may be hard to grasp the news and to believe or accept it. You might feel numb, “blank,” or stunned, as if you are watching someone else’s life play out in front of you. Or, you might feel frightened, sad or worried.

As you learn more about the breast cancer and your treatment options from your doctors, this numbness may lessen and go away. In its place, you could find yourself flooded with different emotions. Some may be overwhelming and difficult, and others easier to manage. It is common to feel shock, anger, sadness or fear.

On the other hand, some experiences may make you feel neutral, hopeful or relieved. Some women with a family history of breast cancer find relief in learning they carry a **gene mutation** that can cause cancer. It tells them why cancer has impacted their family so much. Feeling relief may be confusing, but it is not uncommon or wrong.

“What’s really important is deciding where you focus your energy.”

—ANGELA

As you cycle through your emotions, know you could feel all of them at the same time or at different times. You might also find that all you want to do is move forward. This may be a time when you put your feelings aside, sometimes without even knowing it, to focus on your treatment and other decisions.

All of these responses to diagnosis are normal and reasonable. Many people have felt the same way at this moment. Be patient with yourself. This is an important part of coping, and it will help you take the next steps with your treatment.

Playing those first few days out in my head still feels weird. ... And the strangest part of discovering the cancer was accepting it, because I didn't feel sick."

—AMY

You Are Not to Blame

After the initial shock of diagnosis passes, some people ask other questions, like "Why me?" "How could this have happened?" or "What did I do to deserve this?" You may even feel embarrassed or blame yourself for the cancer.

Know that you didn't do anything to bring on breast cancer. Blaming ourselves or feeling punished for actions that we did or did not take in the past is a common reaction.

Assigning self-blame gives a false sense of control over a situation that may make us feel powerless. It's normal to want to make sense of breast cancer, but try to focus on your needs right now. This will help you look forward, not back.

Coping With Uncertainty

As you deal with new information from your doctors and the natural fears that come with a cancer diagnosis, you may feel uncertain about your future. You may wonder how to make decisions about your next steps.

Consider how you coped with uncertainty in the past. You may want to know everything you possibly can about your situation. Or, you may want to know only what you need to get through treatment. This may mean letting those who care about you take the lead for a little while. When you faced great challenges in the past, what resources did you use? Were there people you trusted? Call on these supports now to help you.

You might also choose to take the lead yourself. Doing so may build your confidence in your choices. As you gather information, talk with your care team about what you learn. Make a list of questions before you see your doctor, nurse or other provider. If your provider's answer to your question did not address a particular concern, ask it in a different way. Ask for copies of your medical records and test results. Many hospitals now have a patient website where you can see your records. Ask your doctors if this is available and if they will update it with your latest results.

It often helps to take someone to your medical appointments who can take notes or, with your doctor's permission, record the conversation. You can focus on the conversation and review notes later.

There is no right or wrong way to respond emotionally. You are doing your best to cope with a life-changing event.

You may feel overwhelmed or even surprised by the feelings that come up for you. Recognize that they are valid. Finding ways to address your feelings and get the support you need is very important. Sometimes, immediately after diagnosis, this may mean coping just well enough until you have more time to work through them. Sometimes this doesn't happen until after treatment ends.

For many, the end of treatment is a welcome break from decision-making, doctor's visits and tests. Focusing on so many aspects of cancer care may have taken all of your energy and kept you from acknowledging your feelings. Once your treatment ends, you may notice that more emotions — even negative ones — may surface. If you do find that you're not feeling emotionally "better" after treatment ends, it's not only OK, it's normal. Read more about managing emotions on page 31.

At first I was overwhelmed. Then I realized I had to start living again, and with time the living has gotten richer. I now have a real sense of gratitude.”

—SARAH



Practical Concerns

At the beginning, your doctors give you a lot of new information. You might wonder how you will find time to talk with your loved ones about your diagnosis, work schedule, home life and relationships. Practical concerns about health insurance, transportation to and from the clinic, organizing your medical records, and how to adjust your daily life for treatment may also be on your mind. Think about who can help you with these tasks so that you don't feel overwhelmed by them.

You may feel pressure to start treatment quickly. This could cause you to worry that you don't have enough time to get or process the information you need. In most cases, breast cancer treatment is not an emergency. You can feel safe taking some time.

Start by talking with your care team about a timeline for treatment. Find out how long you can take to make decisions. Take this time to learn more about the diagnosis and your treatment options, and to gather the people you want around you for support. Taking time to understand your options may give you confidence. Once you have a solid plan, you will likely feel less uncertain. Taking action may help you feel more calm and in control.

You may also wonder how treatment will affect your day-to-day life or that of your loved ones. You may worry about keeping your job or health insurance if you have to take time off work for treatment or because you feel ill.

These are common, reasonable concerns. Try making a list of the things that worry you. Share them with your care team, loved ones and others in your community you turn to for support. Remember, you do not have to do everything yourself! There are people around you — friends, family, neighbors, co-workers and members

of your care team — who can support and sustain you. Giving them a job will make them feel better as well, and it will help you get the support you need. It's not just OK to let others help you — it's important.

Members of your care team (page 31) can direct you to resources that can help you manage money, job and insurance concerns.

LEARN MORE

If you have children you may worry about how your diagnosis will affect them. Visit LBBC.ORG for information on family concerns and resources for children.

Starting Treatment

As you develop a plan and head toward treatment, the feelings you had right after your diagnosis may lessen or change. You may feel more hopeful and grounded. Many people feel better once treatments start because they are actively working to manage or get rid of the cancer.

Surgery, chemotherapy, targeted therapy, hormonal therapy and radiation therapy can prompt strong or mixed emotions, too. Perhaps you dread starting treatment, or you worry about side effects. Talk with your care team. Share your concerns before treatment starts. Often, they can help you address your fears and manage or prevent some of the side effects you may be worried about.

Your experience of breast cancer is your own, just like the reactions and feelings you have about it. No reaction or feeling is more or less expected, and none is more or less “normal.” What's important is to find a balance that helps you move forward. Emotional support (page 30) is key. Throughout this guide, we offer ways to obtain it.

Places to Go for Help

- Your oncologist, oncology nurse, nurse navigator, oncology social worker, oncology psychologist or other members of your cancer care team.
- Your primary care physician, gynecologist, nurse practitioner or physician's assistant.
- Licensed mental health providers, including clinical social workers, licensed professional counselors, psychiatrists and psychologists who work with people with cancer.
- A community health center or clinic.
- Trusted family members or friends.
- Your community center or place of worship.
- Support groups for people affected by breast cancer.
- Social networking outlets, blogs and online resources for those affected by breast cancer. (Ask your care team about good sites, and always share with them what you learn.)
- A health coach from your insurance company.
- LBBC's **Breast Cancer Helpline**. Request a match at lbbc.org/helpline or call toll-free at **(888) 753-5222**.

Learn more about these resources on page 30.





How Treatment Can Impact Your Emotions

You may feel a range of emotions during treatment. They may come from worries and stresses about breast cancer. They also may be related to treatment itself. Teasing out the differences will help you find ways to cope. Figuring out why you feel a certain way will help your healthcare team learn if you need methods to manage emotional side effects.

Treatment for breast cancer often involves more than one therapy. Surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, and hormonal and targeted therapies may be considered. The specific treatment you get will depend on the type and extent of the cancer, as well as on factors like your age, menopausal status and general health. Many side effects of treatment are short-term and can be prevented or lessened. Still, both the short- and long-term side effects of breast cancer and the therapies used to treat it can impact your emotional health. Your feelings may change throughout the course of treatment and over time.

Always consider sharing your emotional concerns with one or more members of your care team, especially if you feel more upset than usual or have trouble with daily activities. A number of breast cancer treatments can cause fatigue and sleep problems. If you're having trouble falling or staying asleep, it's no surprise that you might be more anxious, irritable and impatient, and that you might have trouble concentrating. Many of the techniques in section 3 can lessen fatigue and other side effects, helping improve your mood.

Some people develop anxiety and depression (page 40) during treatment. Several factors increase risk, including a history of depression. Let your healthcare team know about your past mental health so they can get you the support you need.

Is It Just Me, or Is It the Treatment?

It's normal to have a range of emotions during treatment. You may feel sad or anxious, or you might feel quiet and resolved. As treatment progresses, you may find that you want to loudly celebrate or quietly note the completion of one phase of your journey. Worries about the future, side effects, or what it means when you finish treatment may be on your mind. Getting the information you need, when you need it, may help you feel stronger and more confident.

It's also true that many breast cancer treatments cause side effects that can feel like stress, anxiety or depression. Some directly affect your emotions, while others may impact sleep, desire for food or sex, and other matters that could put anyone in a bad mood. Learning the source of your feelings may play a role in how you treat them.

LEARN MORE

Find out more about each of these treatments and what questions to ask your healthcare team in our *Guide to Understanding Treatment Decisions*.



Surgery

Almost every person with breast cancer has surgery. The goal is to remove the cancer and a rim, or **margin**, of healthy tissue around it. Based on the type of cancer and its traits, your doctor may recommend **lumpectomy**, removing just the part of the breast with the cancer, or **mastectomy**, removing the whole breast. A **double mastectomy** involves removing both breasts. You may also choose to have your breast or breasts rebuilt in a **reconstructive surgery**.

Surgery can result in discomfort and fatigue; anesthesia can cause nausea or may make you feel foggy. Your body needs time to heal after an operation, and it's working hard to do that. Rest, good nutrition and gentle activity will help you heal more quickly.

After surgery you will see the impact of cancer on your body. It is often reassuring to know that the cancer has been removed, but you will also be faced with how your chest has changed. You will be aware of scars, or changes in shape or size and sensation. If you had a mastectomy, your feelings about losing one or both breasts or what reconstruction might mean can be very powerful. If it is helpful to you, ask your surgeon to show you pictures of others who had surgeries like yours. (Some people volunteer to have their photos taken before and after surgery.) People who have had breast cancer might even be willing to show you how their surgery turned out. It will take time to adjust to the changes in your body and how you feel about yourself. Be gentle and kind to yourself.

Every woman has her own thoughts and feelings about what her breasts mean to her. Yours could mean a lot, a little, or something in between. Your breasts could be important to your self-image or how your partner responds to you and to your sexual life. Or, they might mean little to you at all.

However you see things, it's important to address any physical or emotional pain you feel. Talk with your providers about your concerns.

Consider being open about your feelings with those you are closest to. Their love, support and acceptance can be very helpful. Sometimes we imagine that others will feel differently about us if anything at all changes on our bodies. In reality, those who love us often still care for us inside and out, no matter what kind of surgery we may have had.

LEARN MORE

To learn more about coping with intimate concerns, read our *Guide to Understanding Intimacy and Sexuality*.

Radiation Therapy

Radiation therapy, sometimes given after surgery, uses high-energy x-rays on areas where cancer cells may remain in the breast or lymph nodes. Often, radiation therapy is given every day, 5 days a week, for several weeks. There are different treatment schedules and ways of giving radiation therapy, so discuss your options with your doctor.

Fatigue is common with radiation therapy and may affect your mood. It tends to build up as treatments go on. This fatigue is due to treatment itself, but it also may be related to having to get therapy every day for several weeks. If you must travel far for treatment, you might feel more tired and drained than you normally would. Just the stress of daily travel and treatment can be exhausting.

Treatment-related fatigue feels very different from regular tiredness. It can come on quickly and exhaust you. Even after a good night's sleep, you may not feel rested. Visit LBBC.ORG to learn more.

Radiation therapy may cause changes in the shape, texture and size of your breast or in the skin. Know that your radiation oncologist and oncology nurses can offer you treatments to help soothe skin irritation and prevent certain side effects. Treating them early may help you feel better physically and, in turn, emotionally.

Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy is given to kill cancer cells that are growing or dividing quickly. Both chemotherapy itself and some medicines taken with it can affect your emotions. Some people feel moody or sad while taking chemotherapy. Steroids, often given with chemotherapies to protect you from allergic reactions, can make you feel jumpy, overly energetic, annoyed, angry or anxious. They can affect your sleep.

Other side effects of chemotherapy indirectly affect mood. Like other breast cancer treatments, chemotherapy can cause or worsen fatigue. The constant tired feeling and the lack of energy to do the activities you want, or have, to do can be frustrating. Make sure to plan ahead and pace yourself. Schedule your days so you won't be overwhelmed and can take frequent breaks. If family or friends offer to help, let them, even if it is just giving you a ride to the store.

Some people report **chemobrain**, problems with thinking, short-term memory and concentration. You might find you forget why you walked into a room or discover you can't recall what you need at the store. Being forgetful can cause frustration, anger, fear and disappointment.

Keep lists of things you want to remember, or put sticky notes in places you can't miss, such as the bathroom door or next to the phone. Try setting a reminder for yourself on your cell phone. If you're willing, let family and friends help with some tasks you can afford to "forget" right now. Do one task at a time and focus on things important to you.

Chemotherapy can cause nausea, vomiting and lack of appetite, and may affect the way foods taste. Not sleeping or eating well can affect your mood, no matter your health status. To keep your stomach from getting upset, try to eat small meals of bland foods — nothing too spicy or greasy — rather than large, heavy meals. Make sure to drink at least eight small glasses of water each day to stay hydrated. If you find that you lose the taste for water, try iced tea, light juices, or sparkling water. Avoiding alcohol can also help as drinking can make it harder to sleep and concentrate. Alcohol can also contribute to depression or make it worse. Discuss your specific dietary needs with your healthcare team. Today, chemotherapy-related nausea can often be prevented, or lessened if it occurs.

It is common for people to gain or lose weight during chemotherapy treatment. Try not to be hard on yourself about these changes. It may surprise you to discover that you are gaining weight when you may have expected weight loss. Chemotherapy may cause hormonal changes that make it difficult for you to keep off weight. Even if you take in the same number of or fewer calories than usual, you may gain weight.

Gaining or losing weight may have a negative impact on your body image and how you feel about yourself. Discuss this with your healthcare team so that they can support you. If you feel that you need help, ask for a referral to a nutritionist or other provider with experience giving dietary counseling to people with cancer.

Some, but not all, chemotherapy medicines can cause hair loss or thinning. This may distress you for many reasons. You may feel that you look ill for the first time — that your cancer is now public and not private. Perhaps you work hard to maintain your appearance and feel attractive.

Losing your hair can be very upsetting and may make you feel less like yourself or less feminine. Many women have shared these feelings. Thinking ahead about how you want to handle hair loss can help you prepare. Consider whether you want to use a scarf, wig, hat or nothing at all. You might also choose to cut your hair before treatment, so you control when you lose it. Whatever you decide, do what feels right for you.



Targeted and Hormonal Therapies

Your breast cancer treatment may include other medicines that could affect your mood. If the cancer is HER2-positive, you will likely need one or more medicines that target the HER2 protein. Ask your healthcare team about what side effects to expect from these medicines. Issues with appetite, sleep, fatigue, changes in weight and other side effects may impact how you feel emotionally.

Hormonal therapies are used to treat breast cancers that are estrogen or progesterone receptor-positive, meaning these hormones cause the cancer to grow. Hormonal therapies include medicines like tamoxifen, which blocks the estrogen receptor, or aromatase inhibitors, which lessen the amount of estrogen a postmenopausal woman's body makes. Another type of hormonal therapy, used in women who are premenopausal, is ovarian ablation or suppression. These are medicine, radiation or surgery that keeps the ovaries from working. Because estrogen plays an important role in how you feel physically and emotionally, hormonal therapies can affect your mood. Many of the effects of hormonal therapies are reversible, but some are not.

LEARN MORE

For more information, talk with your healthcare team and read our *Guide to Understanding Hormonal Therapy* and our *Guide to Understanding HER2-Positive Breast Cancer*.

Hope on the Horizon

No matter the cause of your feelings, there are several ways to improve your mood. You may use some or many of them, or mix and match, to find what works best for you. No matter what you do, always share your thoughts with your healthcare team. They can address issues related to treatment or refer you to other providers who can give you more help.

As you move through treatment, difficult feelings may come and go. They may lessen and, at some point, go away. This may not always be the case, so recognize when your reactions are normal for you and when they feel more intense than you might expect. Feelings of sadness and worry are normal and do not mean you are coping badly. But if you have intense or frequent feelings of depression, anxiety, distress or tearfulness (page 40), seek help from a provider as soon as possible.





Tips to Improve Your Mood

Finding ways to support your emotional health is just as important as getting the right cancer treatment. When negative feelings start to affect your daily life, starting something new can seem difficult. Finding an activity or new coping technique can give you a break from time otherwise spent worrying and help you feel in control. There are many approaches you can take to try to improve your mood and emotional well-being.

Exercise

If you are in treatment, exercise may be the last thing on your mind. But research shows that even a small amount of exercise can have positive, lasting effects on your mood. Exercise can also support you through your treatment and aid in your recovery. It has been shown to help with some side effects, including fatigue, bone loss and chemobrain, and it can help improve body image and sleep.

If exercise has always been part of your life, you don't have to give it up because of breast cancer. It's also OK if you aren't used to exercising. No one expects you to start heavy workouts during treatment! You can take small steps now that may help you later.

Before beginning any new exercise program, it is a good idea to first talk with your healthcare team. Your providers might suggest you see a **physical therapist**, a professional trained to teach you exercises that strengthen and heal your body. If you haven't started treatment yet, your physical therapist will assess your

current physical health and design a plan to help you maintain and regain strength throughout treatment. If you have pain or tightness in the chest, shoulder or arm after surgery, physical therapy may help get you moving comfortably again.

There are many types of exercise, so look for those that most interest you. Walking is popular. It costs nothing, and you can do it anywhere for any length of time. Make it time for yourself or walk with a friend or your pet. Start by walking around the block. If that's too far, go half a block. Even those few minutes of exercise may lift your mood. Work your way up to a block and, as you feel stronger, walk longer. Just being outdoors may help you feel better.

Swimming helps strengthen muscles without putting stress on your bones. It can also relax you and give your heart a good workout. Resistance exercises, including lifting weights or using resistance bands, can help during and after treatment. Other types of movement, such as dance, working out at the gym, taking fitness classes, or just simple stretching at home, may be right for you.

Many hospitals and cancer centers offer classes in yoga, tai chi and qigong. These practices help strengthen your body, ease tension and improve mood. They involve breathing techniques as well as physical movements and poses. Each one has a different focus, so try different methods to discover which you like.

Whatever exercise or fitness plan you choose, look for programs at community centers, gyms and fitness studios designed for people affected by breast cancer. Others with breast cancer can suggest programs they took part in. Be sure to review your exercise plan with your doctors and nurses for encouragement and helpful tips. They may know about specific programs that could interest and benefit you.



Mindfulness Meditation and Guided Imagery

Research shows women in treatment often benefit from practices such as **mindfulness meditation** and **guided imagery**. Sometimes called **complementary and integrative medicine (CIM)**, these therapies are used alongside traditional medical treatment to improve wellness. They are growing more popular in and out of the clinic.

MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

Mindfulness meditation is a kind of focused attention that can relieve stress and help you find a calm place in the moment. The goal of mindfulness is not to change what you are experiencing, but to be aware of your thoughts and feelings, without passing judgment. When your mind strays, you gently bring it back.

There are many forms of mindfulness meditation including sitting and walking meditations, mindful eating and loving-kindness meditation. You can experiment with them until you find the practice or practices that best help you feel calm.

Regular mindfulness practice has shown to reduce stress and anxiety and help people be more kind, compassionate and accepting of themselves. Once you learn to meditate, you can practice anywhere, even at your treatment center.

GUIDED IMAGERY

Guided imagery is a kind of relaxation based on the idea that the body and mind are connected. Using all your senses, your body responds as though what you imagine is real, helping shift your mood. Close your eyes and think of a place that makes you feel calm and safe. Now, imagine being in that place, listening to the calming sounds, breathing in the scent of your surroundings, clearly seeing and touching the objects around you.

Studies have shown that practicing guided imagery regularly can lower heart rate, reduce blood pressure, and encourage healthy breathing as the body relaxes. In turn, guided imagery often helps control feelings of panic and fear, reduces stress and anxiety, and improves overall mental health. You may even find it increases feelings of control.

You can practice guided imagery on your own, with a guide, or with the aid of guided sessions on CD, mobile apps or online videos. One excellent resource is healthjourneys.com.

Many hospitals and cancer centers have integrative and complementary medicine programs that offer these practices. Wellness centers in your community may also have classes.

Writing and Creative Arts

Do you like to express yourself through arts or writing? Expressing your feelings creatively may help you process them in a new way. You might enjoy writing in a journal, taking pictures, starting a scrapbook, painting or drawing, needlework, or many other creative arts.

A plus of arts is that you can keep them private or share them. Today, you can share your feelings widely through blogs or social media sites like Facebook and Instagram. These services may connect you with long-lost friends who had breast cancer or with strangers who offer virtual support. But if computers aren't for you, a plain notebook works just as well. Write letters or make lists. If you don't want anyone else to read them, simply keep them to yourself or destroy them.

Spiritual Support

During times of stress, many of us turn to spiritual practices for comfort. Pastoral leaders or counselors are well trained in helping us cope with life's difficulties. Consider what is available through your church, synagogue or other place of worship. Feeling connected to your community can be very supportive. Or, more private spiritual practices may be helpful to you.

LEARN MORE

To learn more about non-medical therapies, read our *Guide to Understanding Complementary Therapies* and our *Guide to Understanding Yoga & Breast Cancer*.

Ways to Support Yourself

KNOW YOUR LIMITS

- Be patient with yourself. You are coping with a very difficult situation. Try not to be critical of your emotions and reactions.
- Create time for yourself. We often get wrapped up in our lives and caring for others, forgetting to take care of ourselves.
- Set boundaries with your loved ones. Don't be afraid to let them know when you need time alone. Let your friends know when you want to spend a day out of the house or when you need privacy and quiet time.
- At work, talk to a human resources staff member about what accommodations could be made to help you work, if you want or need to keep working during treatment. Your supervisor may need to talk to your co-workers about any responsibilities they may pick up from you during this time, but they do not need to tell anyone why your schedule may be changing if you don't want them to.
- Let people know when you want to talk about something other than cancer.
- Choose a day or evening to relax, and do something to take your mind off of cancer.
- Think about how to slowly resume your normal schedule, if you stopped or things have changed. Set realistic goals for yourself.
- Do not pressure yourself to always have a positive attitude. People should have a range of emotional responses to a cancer diagnosis, which can change day to day and hour to hour. This is normal. Constant pressure to be positive is not helpful.
- Remember, it is OK to ask for help and to accept help when it is offered. Support from friends and family can allow you to focus your energy on coping with treatment and staying well.

REFLECT

- Set aside time to think or write about what's happening now, and what you see for your future. Write down short- and long-term goals.
- Keep a journal or blog, or find a supportive message board. Writing or sharing your story can help you express your feelings and validate your emotions. Other creative outlets, like music, art, cooking, crafts and outside activities such as gardening, can also help you manage and express your feelings.
- Read about other people with breast cancer, or talk with others who share your experience. Sometimes knowing you are not alone can make a real difference in how you see things.

TAKE CARE OF YOUR PHYSICAL HEALTH

- Get enough sleep. Being awake and energized during the day can help. Treatment may disturb your normal sleep pattern, so you may need to rest during the day to keep your energy.
- Exercising can help you maintain a healthy weight, strengthen bones and decrease anxiety and depression. Something as simple as walking can improve sleep, mood and energy. Your doctor can help you determine what types of exercise are right for you.
- Learn ways to quiet your body and mind. Talk with your provider about complementary therapies such as acupuncture, yoga, tai chi, qigong, meditation, guided imagery, hypnosis, reiki or massage. Turn to your own established spiritual or religious practices for guidance and comfort.
- Eat nutritious foods. Avoid too much caffeine in coffee, tea, soda and chocolate. It may increase anxiety and interfere with sleep. Alcohol should also be avoided. It can affect your mood and keep you from a full, restful sleep. Consult a nutritionist.



Getting Emotional Support

Emotional support, both inside and outside your hospital, doctor's office or cancer center, can help you cope with the challenges of breast cancer. When you find the right people, they can offer practical, emotional and spiritual support that eases the stresses of treatment and recovery.

Support means different things to different people. For you, it could mean connecting with other people who have had breast cancer. Or, it might mean reaching out to people who make you feel safe and calm, no matter what their cancer history. You might prefer to build a one-on-one relationship with a mental health professional with experience working with people with breast cancer. Or, perhaps you want that relationship but within a support group.

Different methods of getting support might be helpful at different times, or you might use several at once. Your support needs could change over time as your feelings and needs change. Try different strategies until you find those that feel right. The important thing is to find support that feels meaningful to *you*.

Getting Started: Your Care Team

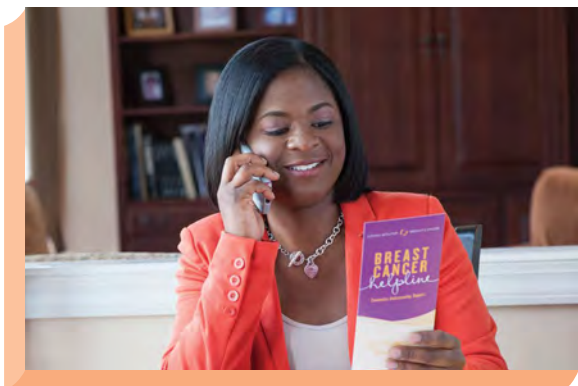
Your emotional health is an important part of your overall cancer treatment, but your doctor may not bring it up. Still, sharing your emotions with your providers can help them sort out whether treatments are behind what you're feeling. If you want to talk but aren't sure how to start, try, "I wish I knew someone else with

breast cancer. Do you know how I could find someone?” or, “I notice lately that I feel sadder than usual. Do you think that could be related to treatment?”

Many members of your team, such as your nurse or social worker, might ask you how you’re doing. If you feel uncomfortable, let them know. Be as specific as possible. Let them know if you noticed a change in your mood after starting a treatment, or if you feel anxious about a side effect.

Not everyone feels comfortable talking about emotions. The way your family communicates, your cultural background, or your personal or religious beliefs might impact how you talk about your thoughts and feelings. Try to remember that your providers are used to hearing concerns like yours. They have probably heard them many times before. What’s most important is finding someone you relate to, both as a person coping with breast cancer and as an individual.

After you talk, your provider might refer you to a support group, nonprofit organizations like Living Beyond Breast Cancer or a mental health professional. Your hospital might have social workers, psychologists or psychiatrists on staff who can help you, too. (To learn what these providers do, see page 35.) You may also choose to seek out support on your own.



Social and Community Support

SUPPORT GROUPS

Support groups bring together people with shared experiences to provide information, support and community. These groups can be open to anyone who wants to attend, or closed, meaning the same people gather for every meeting. Some groups are run by the people seeking support. Others have a trained leader, usually a mental health professional. They help address concerns of the group and point members toward more resources.

Many places offer support groups just for women with breast cancer. Some groups are open to men with breast cancer, too. Some groups allow people with all stages and types of breast cancer to participate. Others are intended for women with early-stage breast cancer or young women with breast cancer. In some areas, support groups may include people with other cancers.

You can also find support groups online through cancer centers, nonprofit groups or social media platforms like Facebook. Many people prefer online support groups because they can be accessed at any time of day, from any location. Before joining, find out how private the group is and whether it has a leader. You may find that you want more or less privacy, or prefer a group with a leader who keeps discussions on track and supportive.

NONPROFIT AND OTHER GROUPS

Once you start talking about breast cancer, you're likely to find affected women everywhere. Because you have something in common besides breast cancer, friendships started at work, through clubs, or in your religious community can feel strong and supportive.

You may also connect with others through nonprofit groups like Living Beyond Breast Cancer. We offer programs where you can meet others coping with breast cancer. Our **Breast Cancer Helpline**, available at lbbc.org/helpline or toll-free at **(888) 753-5222**, can match you to someone who has been through a breast cancer experience much like your own.

Professional Support

TALK THERAPY

If you are feeling sad or anxious, **talk therapy** may help you cope with the emotions and concerns you have from a breast cancer diagnosis, treatment or fears of recurrence. Talk therapy involves speaking with a mental health professional either one-on-one, with your partner, with family, or with other people important in your life. There are different approaches to talk therapy that may focus on thoughts and feelings or on behaviors that affect them. Different approaches can also be combined depending on the issues you are having and the mental health provider you choose. Talk therapy can help you learn strategies to improve your physical and emotional well-being. It has been shown to treat depression and anxiety, and can help with concerns such as fears of recurrence, sleeping problems, body image and other stresses you may face.

In talk therapy, you set the agenda. You may want to talk about how breast cancer impacts how you feel about yourself or your intimate relationships. Or, you might want to talk about other things of concern to you.

Typically, you meet with your provider regularly over several weeks or months. During this time, you may develop new ways to think about things and better understand your feelings. You could learn new ways to express your needs. With your permission, your provider will partner with members of your care team to provide the most effective treatment for you.



PROFESSIONALS WHO CAN HELP

Mental health professionals are trained to help you with many different concerns, including how to talk with loved ones and children, genetic testing, body image, sexual changes, fears of recurrence, managing side effects and more. Often, they can help with practical information, too, such as where to find support for financial or career worries.

These providers have different types of training and interests. As with other types of support, look for someone you trust. If it's important to you, look for someone who shares or understands your cultural background and beliefs. Try different providers until you find one who works best with you.

Some credentialed providers you might talk with are:

- **Oncology social workers**, who have special training in the emotional impact of breast cancer. They provide counseling and education for you and your family. Oncology social workers can help you learn coping skills and help you with insurance, job-related concerns and other matters. Your hospital or care center may have oncology social workers, or you may find them in your community.

- **Oncology nurses**, who give you medical treatments like chemotherapy and help you manage side effects. They can provide help and information about a range of medical and emotional issues, and steer you toward resources.
- **Psychologists**, who can talk with you and your family about the impact of breast cancer. They can also diagnose and treat sleep problems, anxiety and depression (page 40) and help you prepare emotionally for medical procedures. They can offer tips to help you cope with uncertainty and improve your mood, mental clarity, body image, self-esteem and sexual health. In five states – Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana and New Mexico – they can prescribe medicine.
- **Psychiatrists**, who have a medical degree and can prescribe medicines for anxiety, depression and problems with sleep. Some psychiatrists also practice talk therapy and help manage treatment side effects such as fatigue, energy loss, changes in your ability to think or concentrate, and trouble sleeping.

If you find your mood interferes with your daily life, you should seek out a licensed mental health provider. Many focus on people with breast cancer or on cancer in general.

You may also find it helpful to connect with a leader from your faith community.

I loved the nurses in chemo because the first day I was there, they helped me understand that this was the first day that I was starting to get better.”

—ANGELA

CONSULT A MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL IF:

- You are worried about how you feel or function in daily life.
- Your distress does not lessen after starting treatment.
- You want more emotional support.
- Your mood interferes with your ability to function well.
- You have trouble falling or staying asleep, or you sleep all the time.
- Your self-image, body image or self-esteem has changed a great deal.
- You feel overwhelmed by fears the cancer could come back.
- Great sadness gets in the way of your life.
- You stop doing things you enjoy.
- You isolate yourself from family and friends or have trouble speaking with people.
- You skip follow-up visits, treatments or medicines because you want to avoid thinking about cancer.
- You do things you know could hurt you, like drinking too much alcohol, using drugs or eating too much or too little.
- You can't stop crying or feel depressed or anxious more often than not.
- You have thoughts of harming yourself or ending your life.

FINDING A MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL

To find a mental health professional near you, ask your healthcare team for a referral or call your insurance company for in-network providers. You can also consider reaching out to any one of these organizations:

- CancerCare: (800) 813-4673, cancercares.org
- Association of Oncology Social Work: (847) 686-2233, aosw.org
- American Psychological Association: (800) 374-2721, locator.apa.org
- The American Psychosocial Oncology Society: apos-society.org
- American Board of Professional Psychology: (919) 537-8031, abpp.org

Paying for Mental Health Treatment

Discuss payment policies with your healthcare provider, as well as with your insurance company. Call the number on your health insurance card to find out whether mental health services are covered directly, with you providing a copayment. In some cases, you may have to pay in full, up front, and submit a claim for reimbursement.

You may need to get a referral to a mental health provider from a primary care physician, or your insurance company may provide a list of approved providers. Your provider may also have a referral service to connect you with someone who specializes in helping people with breast cancer.

Many hospitals offer counseling on site. Contact the cancer center at your hospital to find out whether it offers these services, or if they can help you find other resources in your community.

If money is tight, you may be able to get mental health services at low or no cost. Some universities have departments of psychology or psychiatry that offer services based on your income. Some providers, federally qualified health centers and low-cost clinics offer services on a sliding scale, or even for free. County, government and nonprofit agencies also may offer mental health services.

LEARN MORE

You may benefit from reading about financial resources and advice in the financial concerns section of our website, LBBC.ORG, or through our *Guide to Understanding Financial Concerns*.





Anxiety and Depression

Feeling sad or anxious doesn't mean you are weak, flawed or coping badly with breast cancer. But you still may find counseling very helpful. Seeking help is a sign of strength and self-respect. It shows a commitment to self-care and is an important part of your healing process.

It is normal to feel a range of emotions during treatment, including sadness or anxiety. You could find yourself feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope. You might have constant concerns about cancer, treatments, your survival or your family. Or, you might go over and over the same thoughts, finding it hard to concentrate or sleep.

Many of the symptoms of anxiety and depression are directly caused by treatment. They may also point to an underlying anxiety or mood disorder. Knowing the difference is difficult, but your care team will be able to help.

Anxiety

If you feel very anxious, your worries about breast cancer might intrude on other areas of your life that feel unrelated.

With an **anxiety disorder**, you may experience these symptoms:

- You feel as if you are in a constant state of tension or worry.
- Your worries shift from one problem to another.

- You have trouble managing your worries and concerns.
- You feel restless, “keyed up” or edgy.
- You feel fatigued or become tired easily.
- You have trouble concentrating.
- You feel irritable.
- You have trouble falling or staying asleep or wake up feeling as if you have not slept well.

Keep in mind that you don’t have to have all of these symptoms to be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder.

Depression

It’s also understandable for you to feel sadness over cancer and cancer treatment. You may feel you will always be stuck where you are, that certain parts of breast cancer and treatment will be constants in your life. You may have trouble sleeping, or find yourself sleeping too much. In day-to-day life, you might be irritable, impatient or, on the other hand, numb and slow to react to emotional situations.

Not all people who feel sad are depressed. If your thoughts and feelings of sadness begin to interfere with your daily life, a trained mental health provider might diagnose **depression**. Some people have major depression during the course of treatment. Different from a few days of feeling “down” or “blue,” **major depression** means your sadness lasts for weeks or months, interfering with your daily living and quality of life. If you feel this way, talk with your doctor or a therapist to find out if counseling or medicine may be right for you.

Symptoms of depression include:

- Continued sadness, depressed mood or crying
- Trouble getting motivated

- Loss of interest in favorite activities
- Feeling guilty, hopeless, helpless or worthless
- Inability to feel pleasure or have fun
- Fatigue
- Sleeping too much or too little, or trouble falling or staying asleep
- Lack of energy
- Change in appetite
- Less interest in sex or intimacy
- Problems with concentration
- Thoughts of death or suicide

Keep in mind that you don't have to have all or most of these symptoms to be diagnosed with depression.

As you move forward, uncomfortable feelings will probably come and go, then lessen and, at some point, should go away. This may not always be the case, so it's important for you to recognize when your reactions are normal and when they may be more intense than you might expect. Depression and anxiety are often serious medical conditions that can be effectively treated.

Strong feelings of depression or anxiety are not the only reasons to talk with someone. Talking about more mild sadness or worry can also be helpful. It can be frustrating to feel you have little control over your emotions. Try not to lose hope. Let your care team know how you feel. They can help you get the right treatment.

CLINICAL FORMS OF ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

Anxiety and depressive disorders are not all the same. Your doctor will determine if you have a disorder and help you find the best way to treat it. The common forms of both types of disorders are listed below.

ANXIETY DISORDERS

- **Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)**

Excessive worry about everyday things

- **Adjustment Disorder With Anxiety**

Worry and nervousness that begin within 3 months of a major change in a person's life, such as a cancer diagnosis

- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**

Feelings of fear, stress, numbness or edginess experienced when there is no danger or other trigger present

- **Panic Disorder**

Experiencing severe panic attacks, or feelings of fear that last for several minutes

DEPRESSIVE DISORDERS

- **Persistent Depressive Disorder (PDD)**

(formerly known as dysthymic disorder)

Feelings of moderate depression that occur most days for at least 2 years

- **Major Depression**

Feelings of depression that occur consistently for more than a few days

- **Adjustment Disorder With Depressed Mood**

Sadness and hopelessness that begin within 3 months of a major change in a person's life, such as a cancer diagnosis



Medicine

In some cases, your doctor might suggest you take medicine for anxiety or depression, to help support you through difficult emotional periods.

Even if you are only mildly depressed or anxious, your doctor may recommend medicine for you. Many different medicines can be used to manage anxiety and depression, no matter the cause.

There are several effective medicines that help with anxiety, depression and sleep. These medicines all work differently and have different uses. All have potential side effects, which typically lessen over time. If you take medicine and find it affects you in unexpected ways, consult with your doctor.

Which medicines you are given depends on many factors, including other medicines you take and your unique needs. These medicines can take several weeks to start working, so continue taking them as prescribed, even if you do not feel better right away.

Doctors believe some antidepressants may cause tamoxifen, a treatment for hormone receptor-positive breast cancer, to be not as effective. An enzyme in the liver, CYP2D6, needs to break tamoxifen down so it can do its job. But some antidepressants inhibit CYP2D6 from working as well. If CYP2D6 can't break tamoxifen down as well, tamoxifen may not be as strong at preventing recurrence.

Clinical trials have not proven that taking antidepressants at the same time as tamoxifen will cause tamoxifen to fail. But because doctors know how the medicines might impact each other, they often avoid giving someone on tamoxifen antidepressants that have a negative impact on CYP2D6.

Each antidepressant impacts CYP2D6 differently, so talk with your doctor about which is safest to take while you're on tamoxifen. They are unlikely to offer you **fluoxetine (Prozac)** or **paroxetine (Paxil)** because of their strong interaction with CYP2D6. If you already take one of these medicines, tell your oncologist before you start taking tamoxifen.

Talk with your oncologist before starting any medicines or supplements that are not part of your regular cancer treatment. As with your breast cancer treatments, report any side effects.

You should not stop taking medicine without talking to your providers. Abruptly stopping medicines for depression and anxiety is dangerous, and can result in serious, potentially life-threatening side effects. Your healthcare provider can help you safely taper your medicines.

For more information on specific medicines and possible side effects or interactions, visit the National Institute of Mental Health website at nimh.nih.gov.

IF YOU FEEL LIFE IS NOT WORTH LIVING

If you feel hopeless, reckless or trapped, or you think you are in danger of hurting yourself, we strongly encourage you to call the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** at **(800) 273-8255**. This hotline provides free and confidential emotional support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call right away if you:

- Have thoughts of wanting to hurt or kill yourself
- Are looking for ways to kill yourself
- Feel hopeless, cannot control your anger or feel as if there is no way out
- Are doing more risky things
- Are drinking alcohol more often and too much or using drugs
- Have extreme mood changes
- Tend to isolate yourself from friends and loved ones
- Lose your sense of purpose in life



Your Emotions After Initial Treatment

When initial treatment ends, you and your caregivers may feel relief that you've made it through all the appointments, medicines and physical demands of breast cancer and its treatments. Or, you might feel differently.

Though the end of treatment marks an important health milestone, the emotional impact of breast cancer may continue. How long varies by person.

Finishing Treatment

Finishing chemotherapy, radiation therapy or other treatments can be a relief, foster a sense of accomplishment and be difficult, all at the same time. During treatment, you may not have had time to think about all that has happened. Afterward, you may go through a period when you feel good about getting through this challenge. Or, you could find yourself feeling vulnerable because you're not seeing your medical team as often. Now you may have the time to reflect on what you've been through and how cancer and treatments have impacted your life.

“The reality didn't hit until a year later. Now that there's no next step, it's given me time to think about the past year.”

—RACHEL

You're probably also seeing your medical and personal support teams less often. You might worry about aches and pains or other signs and symptoms. If you take targeted therapies after primary treatment you may also worry about side effects of those medicines.

After being so proactive in your treatment, feelings of sadness, anger or worry about the future are valid, reasonable and normal. Many women also report that going through treatment has impacted their outlook in a positive way as they move forward with their lives.

The flip side of the fear is this feeling of gratitude and joy. My faith in humanity has been restored through this experience.”

—MICHELLE

Your Emotions Over Time

As time passes, you may find that breast cancer changes the way you feel about yourself. Some of these changes may impact your self-image, body image and relationships with others. You may no longer feel like yourself, or worry that changes in the way you see yourself are something others experience as well.

But change is not always negative, and facing a challenge like breast cancer can prompt positive changes known as **post-traumatic growth (PTG)**. You may find you have become more confident, emotionally stronger and more willing to try new things. Your relationships, rather than becoming more difficult, could improve as you begin to focus on what's important to you. Personal goals, career choices, intimate relationships, and connections to family, friends and community may shift after going through breast cancer treatment.

Whether changes in you, your lifestyle or your relationships are large or small, they are still changes. Choosing to accept your new reality, and knowing about the tools and supports that can help you, doesn't make breast cancer easier. But it can help you manage what's happening in your life right now. It might even prompt you to chart a new course for your life.

“Recovery was a huge dilemma. After the process of treatment ended, I struggled with the emotional hit.”

—AMY

Feelings Toward Your Changing Circle of Support

As you transition into your life after initial treatment, the circle of support that may have included your family, friends, co-workers, community members and providers may seem more distant. When your loved ones see you feeling better on the outside, they may not understand that cancer and cancer treatment can still be affecting you on the inside. You may feel angry or alone because of these changes.

As you continue to recover, you may need to share your ongoing needs with those who supported you. Try to help them better understand how you're feeling. You might say something like, “I know I seem a lot better, but I am still healing inside and could use some support from you,” or “This has been hard for me, and not just physically. I still need people around me who I can count on to understand.” You may want to find one friend who can talk whenever you need to. You can also seek out a support or therapy group to connect with others affected by breast cancer.

Fear of Recurrence

Fear of recurrence, or fear of the cancer coming back, is common. After you finish treatment, you may carry your fears with you. Or, you might feel ready to move on and stop thinking about cancer.

Your fears of recurrence may change over time. But right now, it might upset you to go to follow-up visits or get regular tests like mammograms. It's also possible you may find these check-ups and tests reassuring. Whatever your feelings, it's important to continue doing these things, even if you're uncomfortable. To lessen your anxiety around follow-up appointments, consider learning relaxation techniques like meditation or guided imagery, having a friend go with you, or talking with a mental health provider. Try not to fall into the trap of over-testing. Having too many tests and doctor appointments may make anxiety about recurrence worse, not better.

Your doctor should outline a **survivorship care plan** with you based on your needs. This plan will be a guide for you as you move from active treatment to life beyond breast cancer. Its goal is to help you stay healthy, physically and emotionally. It can also help doctors who care for you in the future better understand your medical history. Be sure to share your concerns and ask questions about this plan so you can trust that your healthcare team is monitoring you appropriately.

LEARN MORE

Living Beyond Breast Cancer offers a free *Guide to Understanding Fear of Recurrence*. It explores why you fear recurrence, and offers tips to help you manage your worries and move forward.

Reminders and Milestones

Reminders of breast cancer may seem as if they are everywhere. Frequent news coverage and statistics about breast cancer can affect your feelings. Hair loss, weight changes, insomnia, fatigue, lymphedema and troubles with intimacy can alter your body image and affect self-esteem. It's common to feel uncertain about how treatments may impact you physically early on and over time.

Milestones can also trigger powerful feelings. You may feel intense joy at happy occasions or mixed, bittersweet emotions at other times. The date of your diagnosis, surgery or completion of treatment may be a positive time, or bring back distressing feelings.

If you feel stress around holidays, birthdays, the anniversary of your diagnosis or other life events, consider these tips:

- Ask family members or friends to help with holiday matters, such as putting up decorations, cleaning or making meals.
- Find a friend familiar with your personal history to spend time talking with you about your feelings.
- Focus on things you enjoy, such as spending time with loved ones, relaxing or doing favorite hobbies and activities.
- Celebrate milestones with gatherings or meals to bring your circle of support together, thanking them or reminding them they are still important in your life.
- Talk with a woman who knows what you are going through by contacting our **Breast Cancer Helpline** at lbbc.org/helpline or calling toll-free **(888) 753-5222**. Helpline volunteers offer guidance and peer support.



Embracing Change and the Future

Breast cancer changes many things about your physical, emotional and social life, sometimes without you realizing it. Maybe your experience has helped you find a new, unexpected view of life. Maybe you now have a better idea of what and who is important to you. Research shows that after a cancer diagnosis many women report a deeper appreciation for life and improved relationships with family and friends.

On the other hand, change is hard. Many, many people struggle with change whether it comes from a cancer diagnosis or something else. As changes happen in your life, it is OK to accept them slowly and allow yourself time to adjust. There is no reason to make changes too suddenly or to make many changes at once.

Just as your feelings about breast cancer are your own, how you choose to move forward after treatment is also very personal. What's most important is continuing to pay attention to your self-care and quality of life. How you do that is up to you. You need to find what works best for you.

It's possible that your emotions may be mixed. There are times when you may feel sad and overwhelmed, while at other times you may feel energized and ready to take on the world. With some attention to the way you're feeling, there is a good chance that you will, like many people, adjust well over time.

Moving Forward

Creating a plan for follow-up care can help you feel more confident and in control of your health. You may feel relief about ending initial treatment. You may also worry as you move forward and miss the regular, ongoing support and reassurance you received from your care team. Ask your healthcare providers about creating a survivorship care plan. This plan can help you feel more secure about moving from active treatment to life beyond breast cancer.

You may choose to maintain contact with people who helped you during treatment. Connections and friends from support and therapy groups may share some of your emotions. Discussing your shared experience can be helpful. Volunteering for a breast cancer organization or other nonprofit group is another way for you to empower yourself, helping you as well as others once you have attended to your own needs.

You might also choose to do something to step away from breast cancer. It may have been the center of your world for some time. Finding an activity you enjoy that has nothing to do with the disease may help you adjust to the time you have now that your frequent appointments and treatments are over. It may even be enough to be around your family, friends or social groups without having to talk or think about cancer.

Continuing to take care of yourself, and understanding that it is reasonable for breast cancer to sometimes continue to impact your emotions, is important for supporting your overall well-being. Your emotional experience is vital to your quality of life, and LBBC is always here to listen.

“My life has been changed by cancer, but I am hopeful.”

—MICHELLE





Resources

Words to Know

Adjustment disorder with anxiety. Worry and nervousness that begin within 3 months of a major change in a person's life, such as a cancer diagnosis.

Adjustment disorder with depressed mood. Sadness and hopelessness that begin within 3 months of a major change in a person's life, such as a cancer diagnosis.

Anxiety disorder. Disorder that includes symptoms such as constant tension or worry, restlessness, fatigue, irritability and trouble falling or staying asleep.

Chemobrain. Problems with thinking, memory or concentration that appear after breast cancer treatment begins.

Chemotherapy. Treatment that kills cancer cells that are growing or dividing quickly.

Complementary and integrative medicine (CIM) / Complementary therapies. Practices such as yoga and meditation, used alongside traditional medicine, to ease the side effects of cancer treatment.

Depression. Ongoing feelings of sadness, despair, loss of energy and difficulty dealing with normal daily life.

Double mastectomy. Surgery that removes both breasts.

Fear of recurrence. Fear of the cancer coming back.

Fluoxetine (Prozac). An antidepressant that is part of the SSRI family. It may cause tamoxifen, a treatment for hormone-sensitive breast cancer, not to work as well.

Gene mutation. A change in DNA that may make developing breast cancer more likely.

Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD). Excessive worry about everyday things.

Guided imagery. A complementary therapy based on the idea that the body and the mind are connected. It may relieve some breast cancer treatment side effects, such as stress, through relaxation.

Hormonal therapies. Medicines that are used to treat breast cancers that are estrogen or progesterone receptor-positive, meaning hormones cause the cancer to grow. Because estrogen plays an important role in how you feel physically and emotionally, hormonal therapies can affect your mood.

Lumpectomy. Breast-conserving surgery that removes the tumor and a rim of healthy tissue, but leaves the rest of the breast.

Major depression. Feelings of depression that occur consistently for more than a few days.

Margin. The rim of healthy tissue that surrounds a tumor. Along with the tumor, the margin is removed during a lumpectomy.

Mastectomy. Surgery that removes the entire breast.

Mindfulness meditation. A complementary therapy that uses focused attention to relieve stress. The goal is to be aware of your thoughts and feelings, without passing judgment.

Oncology nurses. Healthcare providers who give medical treatments like chemotherapy, help manage side effects and provide other information and resources.

Oncology social workers. Professionals who have special training in the emotional impact of breast cancer. They provide counseling and education.

Panic disorder. Experiencing severe panic attacks, or feelings of fear that last for several minutes.

Paroxetine (Paxil). An antidepressant that is part of the SSRI family. It may cause tamoxifen, a treatment for hormone-sensitive breast cancer, not to work as well.

Persistent depressive disorder (PDD). Feelings of moderate depression that occur most days for at least 2 years. Formerly known as dysthymic disorder.

Physical therapist. A professional trained to teach you exercises that strengthen and heal your body.

Post-traumatic growth (PTG). Positive psychological changes a person may experience after facing a challenge like breast cancer.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Feelings of fear, stress, numbness or edginess when there is no danger or other trigger present.

Psychiatrists. Healthcare providers who have medical degrees and who can prescribe medicine for anxiety, depression and problems with sleep.

Psychologists. Healthcare providers who can talk about the emotional impact of breast cancer.

Radiation therapy. Treatment that uses high-energy x-rays on areas where cancer cells may remain in the breast or lymph nodes.

Reconstructive surgery. Surgery to rebuild the breast or breasts.

Survivorship care plan. A guide that you and your doctor create to help you as you move from active treatment to life beyond breast cancer. Its goal is to help you stay healthy, physically and emotionally.

Talk therapy. Involves speaking one-on-one with a mental health professional about your thoughts and feelings.

Targeted therapies. Treatments that target specific proteins that help cancer cells grow.



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