

Living with Breast Cancer - A Quick Guide



Contents

This is a brief summary of the information on 'Living with breast cancer' from CancerHelp UK. You will find more detailed information on the website.

In this information there are sections on

- Coping with breast cancer
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- Breast cancer and menopausal symptoms
- Questions for your doctor
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Coping with breast cancer

It can be very difficult to cope with a diagnosis of cancer, both practically and emotionally. You are likely to feel very confused and upset at first. As well as coping with the fear and anxiety that a diagnosis of cancer brings, you may have to work out how to manage practically.

The CancerHelp UK 'coping with cancer' section contains lots of information you may find helpful. There are sections about

- Your feelings and talking about cancer
- How you can help yourself
- Who else can help you

- Where to get practical and financial support

Living with breast cancer surgery

It can take some time to adjust to a new body shape after breast cancer surgery. The swelling and bruising will go down and the scars from your operation will gradually get less obvious. Women usually gradually become used to their new shape, and false breast shape (prosthesis) if they wear one. You are likely to find that your confidence will gradually come back.

Your feelings after breast surgery

The first months may be very upsetting. Many women have feelings of grief, fear, shock, anger and resentment. Your self confidence may also be affected. Many women need time to come to terms with the changes to, or loss of, their breast. Give yourself time to adjust. It can help to talk to friends and family and your breast cancer nurse.

Finding out beforehand about the likely effects of the operation can really help in dealing with them afterwards. Talking to people who have had similar experiences can also help.



Sexuality after breast surgery

Your emotions after breast surgery may change your sexual feelings for a while. And if you think your partner may be put off, you may worry about allowing them to see or touch your body. There is no right or wrong way to approach this. Some women feel very sensitive and need time to build up their courage to be looked at or touched by their partner. Others need almost instant comfort and find that loving touch relieves their fear of being rejected.

Pregnancy and breast cancer

Avoiding pregnancy during treatment

If you are having chemotherapy, tamoxifen, or herceptin it is very important not to get pregnant. Even if your treatment is likely to make you infertile, it may not do so straight away. The treatment could damage a developing baby. Women who have had breast cancer are usually advised not to take the pill. You can talk to your hospital doctor or GP about the best choice of birth control for you.

Pregnancy after breast cancer

If you want to have a baby after treatment, talk it over with your doctor and partner. Most doctors recommend waiting 2 years after your treatment has finished before trying to get pregnant. This is because, if you are going to have a recurrence of your breast cancer, it is most likely to be within the first 2 years after diagnosis. The longer you stay free from breast cancer, the less likely it is that it will come back. But you still need to think about what might happen if the cancer comes back after you have had a baby.

The effect of treatment on your fertility

Unfortunately you will not be able to have children if you have had radiotherapy to your ovaries, an operation to remove your ovaries, or some types of chemotherapy. Infertility can be very difficult to cope with if you wanted to have a child or increase your family. Talking to friends and family may help. But you can also ask for professional help from a breast care nurse or counsellor.

Breast cancer and menopausal symptoms

Some breast cancer treatments may put you into an early menopause, and you may have symptoms. Hormone therapy can cause menopausal symptoms even in women whose periods stopped some years before they were diagnosed with breast cancer.

Symptoms related to the menopause include hot flushes and sweats, anxiety, depression, loss of sex drive, dry skin, dryness in the vagina, and gradual bone thinning.

HRT after breast cancer

Doctors do not recommend taking hormone replacement therapy after breast cancer. This is because HRT can increase the risk that the breast cancer will come back. But some doctors will prescribe HRT for very severe menopausal symptoms.

Other ways of dealing with symptoms

There are other ways of dealing with menopausal symptoms besides HRT. Sometimes there are other drugs that your doctor can prescribe. There are also things you can do for yourself that may help. CancerHelp UK has information on dealing



with hot flushes and sweats, vaginal dryness, and bone thinning.

What to ask your doctor about living with breast cancer

- What kind of birth control is best for me?
- How well does it prevent pregnancy?
- What problems might I have if I get pregnant before my treatment is finished?
- How long after my treatment should I wait before trying to get pregnant?
- Are there health and other risks of being pregnant once the breast cancer treatment ends?
- How much will I be able to live a normal life?
- Can you suggest someone to help me with the emotional side of breast cancer?
- In my case, what do you advise me to tell my children?
- Should my daughter worry about breast cancer being passed on?
- What can reduce hot sweats?
- Are there medicines to help reduce menopausal symptoms?

Breast cancer organisations

Cancer Research UK
Main website: www.cancerresearchuk.org

Notes



Patient information website:
<http://cancerhelp.cancerresearchuk.org>
Cancer Information Nurses phone: 0808
800 40 40

Breast Cancer Care
Helpline: 0808 800 6000 (Monday to Friday
9.00 am - 5.00 pm + Sat - 9.00 am - 2.00
pm)
Phone: 0845 092 0800
Email: info@breastcancercare.org.uk
Website: www.breastcancercare.org.uk

Breakthrough Breast Cancer
Tel: 08080 100 200 (Mon-Fri 8am-8pm Sat
9am-12pm)
Website:
www.breakthroughbreastcancer.org.uk
Email:
info@breakthroughbreastcancer.org.uk

Hereditary Breast Cancer Helpline
Phone: 01629 813000 (helpline 24 hours)
Email: canhelp@btopenworld.com

More information

For more information about breast cancer, visit our website
<http://cancerhelp.cancerresearchuk.org>

You will find a wide range of detailed, up to date information for people affected by cancer, including a clinical trials database that you can search for cancer trials in the UK. You can view or print the information in a larger size if you need to.

For answers to your questions about cancer call our Cancer Information Nurses on **0808 800 4040** 9am till 5pm Monday to Friday

Adapted from Cancer Research UK's Patient Information Website CancerHelp UK in February 2011. CancerHelp UK is not designed to provide medical advice or professional services and is intended to be for educational use only. The information provided through CancerHelp UK and our nurse team is not a substitute for professional care and should not be used for diagnosing or treating a health problem or disease. If you have, or suspect you may have, a health problem you should consult your doctor. © Cancer Research UK 2011. Cancer Research UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1089464) and in Scotland (SC041666).