



# After Treatment

## Lymphedema after breast cancer treatment

Lymphedema is a swelling of the arm caused by fluid build-up. It can occur any time after treatment for breast cancer, either right after surgery or months, or even years later. There is no way to know who will and will not develop lymphedema.

With care, lymphedema can often be avoided or kept under control. Injury or infection of the arm on the affected side can cause lymphedema or make it worse. Tell your doctor right away about any swelling, tightness, or injury to the hand or arm. There are ways to help prevent problems. For instance, most doctors suggest that women avoid having blood drawn from or blood pressures taken on the arm on the side of the lymph node surgery or radiation. To learn more, see our document, [Lymphedema: What Every Woman With Breast Cancer Should Know](#).

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<http://www.cancer.org/cancer/breastcancer/overviewguide/breast-cancer-overview-after-lymphedema>

## Emotional aspects of breast cancer

You may have been going through so much during treatment that you could not focus on anything else. Once your treatment ends, you might find yourself overwhelmed by emotions. This happens to a lot of women. This is an ideal time to [seek out support](#). You need people you can turn to for strength and comfort. Support can come in many forms: family, friends, cancer support groups, church or spiritual groups, online support groups, or individual counselors. The cancer journey can feel very lonely, but you don't have to go it alone. If you aren't sure who can help, call us and we can put you in touch with a group or other resource.

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<http://www.cancer.org/cancer/breastcancer/overviewguide/breast-cancer-overview-after-emotional-health>



## Body image after breast cancer treatment

Many women with breast cancer also find themselves dealing with the fact that treatment changed the way they look. Some changes may be short term, such as hair loss. But even short-term changes can have a major effect on how a woman feels about herself. A number of options are available to help women cope with hair loss, including wigs, hats, scarves, and more. For a list of some companies that sell wigs and other hair accessories, call the American Cancer Society 1-800-227-2345 and ask for our document, [Breast Protheses and Hair Loss Accessories List](#). On the other hand, some women may choose to show off their baldness as a way to identify themselves as breast cancer survivors.

Of course, women treated for breast cancer also face long term changes in the way their breasts look.

Whatever the changes you may face, it's important to know that there is advice and support out there to help you cope with these changes. Talking with your doctor or nurse is often a good starting point. There are also many support groups, such as our [Reach To Recovery](#) program. Visit our [website](#) or call us at 1-800-227-2345 to learn more about programs in your area.

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## Sexuality after breast cancer

Concerns about sexuality are often very worrisome to a woman with breast cancer. Aside from body image, some treatments for breast cancer, such as chemo, can change a woman's hormone levels and may reduce her sexual interest or response. Treatment for breast cancer can also affect the pleasure a woman gets from having her breasts touched.

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<http://www.cancer.org/cancer/breastcancer/overviewguide/breast-cancer-overview-after-sexuality>

## Pregnancy after breast cancer

Although not many studies have been done, nearly all have found that pregnancy does not increase the risk of the cancer coming back after successful treatment. Still, many doctors advise breast cancer patients not to become pregnant for at least 2 years after all treatment is over. This would allow any early return of the cancer to be found, which in turn could affect a woman's decision to become pregnant. But this 2-year wait period is not based on strong scientific evidence.

Still, chemotherapy, targeted therapy, and hormone treatment drugs can affect the fetus, so it isn't safe to get pregnant until all treatment is over. If you are thinking about getting pregnant, be sure to talk to your doctor first. Sometimes counseling can help you sort out the complex issues about motherhood and breast cancer survivorship.

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<http://www.cancer.org/cancer/breastcancer/overviewguide/breast-cancer-overview-after-pregnancy-after>

## Post-menopausal hormone treatment (PHT) after breast cancer

In the past doctors, have offered PHT (also called *hormone replacement therapy* or *HRT*) to women after breast cancer treatment to help with severe symptoms of menopause. But studies have shown that women taking PHT after treatment for breast cancer are much more likely to have the cancer come back or to develop a new breast cancer. For this reason, most doctors now feel that it is unwise for women who have been treated for breast cancer to use PHT. Women may want to ask their doctors about other ways to handle symptoms of menopause.

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<http://www.cancer.org/cancer/breastcancer/overviewguide/breast-cancer-overview-after-post-menopausal-therapy>



## Seeing a new doctor after breast cancer treatment

At some point after your cancer is found and treated, you may find yourself in the office of a new doctor. It is important that you be able to give your new doctor the exact details of your diagnosis and treatment. Gathering these details soon after treatment may be easier than trying to get them at some point in the future. Make sure you have this information handy and always keep copies for yourself:

- A copy of your pathology report from any biopsies or surgeries
- If you had surgery, a copy of your operative report
- If you were in the hospital, a copy of the discharge summary that the doctor prepared when you were sent home from the hospital
- If you had radiation treatment, a copy of your treatment summary
- If you had drug treatment (hormone therapy, chemotherapy, or targeted therapies), a list of your drugs, drug doses, and when you took them

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<http://www.cancer.org/cancer/breastcancer/overviewguide/breast-cancer-overview-after-seeing-a-new-doctor>

## Lifestyle changes after breast cancer treatment

You can't change the fact that you have had cancer. What you can change is how you live the rest of your life — making choices to help you stay healthy and feel as well as you can. This can be a time to look at your life in new ways. Maybe you are thinking about how to improve your health over the long term. Some people even start during cancer treatment.

### Make healthier choices

For many people, finding out they have cancer helps them focus on their health in ways they may not have thought much about in the past. Are there things you could do that might make you healthier? Maybe you could try to [eat better](#) or [get more exercise](#). Maybe you could cut down on alcohol, or give up tobacco. Even things like keeping your stress level under control may help. Now is a good time to think about making changes that can have positive effects for the rest of your life. You will feel better and you will also be healthier.

You can start by working on those things that worry you most. Get help with those that are harder for you. For instance, if you are thinking about [quitting smoking](#) and need help, call the American Cancer Society for information and support.

### Eating better

Eating right can be hard for anyone, but it can get even tougher during and after cancer treatment. Treatment may change your sense of taste. Nausea can be a problem. You might not feel like eating and lose weight when you don't want to. Or you may have gained weight that you can't seem to lose. All of these things can be very frustrating.

If treatment caused weight changes or eating or taste problems, do the best you can and keep in mind that these problems usually get better over time. You may find it helps to eat small portions every 2 to 3 hours until you feel better. You may also want to ask your cancer team about seeing a dietitian, an expert in nutrition who can give you ideas on how to deal with these treatment side effects.

One of the best things you can do after cancer treatment is put healthy eating habits into place. You may be surprised at the long-term benefits of some simple changes, like increasing the variety of healthy foods you eat. Getting to and staying at a healthy weight, eating a healthy diet, and limiting your alcohol intake may lower your risk for a number of types of cancer, as well as having many other health benefits.

## Lifestyle Changes ( Continued)

### Rest, fatigue, and exercise

Extreme tiredness, called *fatigue*, is very common in people treated for cancer. This is not a normal tiredness, but a "bone-weary" exhaustion that doesn't get better with rest. For some people, fatigue lasts a long time after treatment, and can make it hard for them to exercise and do other things they want to do. But exercise can help reduce fatigue. Studies have shown that patients who follow an exercise program tailored to their personal needs feel better physically and emotionally and can cope better, too.

If you were sick and not very active during treatment, it is normal for your fitness, endurance, and muscle strength to decline. Any plan for physical activity should fit your own situation. A person who has never exercised will not be able to take on the same amount of exercise as someone who plays tennis twice a week. If you haven't exercised in a few years, you will have to start slowly — maybe just by taking short walks.

Talk with your health care team before starting anything. Get their input about your exercise plans. Then, try to find an exercise buddy so you're not doing it alone. Having family or friends involved when starting a new exercise program can give you that extra boost of support to keep you going when the push just isn't there.

If you are very tired, you will need to balance activity with rest. It is OK to rest when you need to. Sometimes it's really hard for people to allow themselves to rest when they are used to working all day or taking care of a household, but this is not the time to push yourself too hard. Listen to your body and rest when you need to. (For more information on dealing with fatigue, please see [Fatigue in People With Cancer](#) and [Anemia in People With Cancer](#).)

Exercise can improve your physical and emotional health.

- It improves your cardiovascular (heart and circulation) fitness.
- Along with a good diet, it will help you get to and stay at a healthy weight.
- It makes your muscles stronger.
- It reduces fatigue.
- It can help lower anxiety and depression.
- It can help make you feel generally happier.
- It helps you feel better about yourself.



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After Treatment of Breast Cancer

Long term, we know that getting regular physical activity plays a role in helping to lower the risk of some cancers, as well as having other health benefits.

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<http://www.cancer.org/cancer/breastcancer/overviewguide/breast-cancer-overview-after-lifestyle-changes>