



CANCERcare®

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Fact Sheet

Breast Cancer: Coping With Your Changing Feelings

Having breast cancer affects you in many different ways. For example, treatments may change the way you look and how you feel about yourself and your body. The demands of treatment may also affect your personal relationships or make it difficult to manage your usual activities and responsibilities. Fortunately, these are challenges you do not have to face alone.

Here are some tips for coping with the difficult emotions that may come up with breast cancer:

Share your feelings. Talking about your emotions might be hard, but it can comfort you and the people who care about you. When you tell someone whom you love what you're feeling, you give that person a chance to support you. You also give your relationship with that person a chance to grow.

Be specific. When reaching out to others, be specific about the kind of support you need. Saying something like, "It would be helpful if you could shop for groceries this week," or "Can you please drive me to my next appointment?" gives people a clear way to help. This approach cuts down on frustration and reassures your family and friends that they are being helpful.



Take steps to look and feel your best. Many women feel uncomfortable with their appearance after having surgery or chemotherapy. If you had breast surgery or are experiencing hair loss and changes in your physical appearance, learn about options available, such as breast prostheses and wigs. Give yourself time to adjust to changes, and try different solutions until you find what makes you feel most comfortable.

Let yourself feel loved and cared for. After a lumpectomy or mastectomy, a woman may find that regular activities, such as dressing, undressing, bathing, or being intimate with her partner or spouse, give rise to complex emotions. Some women feel so different that they stop taking care of their emotional and physical needs. For example, a woman may distance herself emotionally from her partner. You can make other choices, such as choosing to remain close with your partner or spouse. Everyone deserves to feel loved and cared for.

Talk to your spouse or partner about the physical closeness you need. Share how you feel about your body, and talk about what you think or worry that your partner is feeling. Whatever your needs are – whether you feel a need for physical affection, or if you are not yet interested in

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being physically intimate – let your partner know. Your partner is most likely waiting for your signal to know what to do, how to act, and what you need.

Discuss your concerns with your doctor or nurse. If you feel you have lost the desire to be physically intimate, bring it up with your doctor or nurse. These health care professionals can help you understand physical changes that may be causing these feelings. They can also suggest ways to increase your interest in physical intimacy and make appropriate referrals if needed.



Get help for lymphedema. Lymphedema is a painful swelling, usually in an arm or leg, which happens when the body's lymphatic fluid fails to circulate properly and builds up in the soft tissue instead. There are several ways to manage lymphedema. Your doctor or nurse can give you tips to prevent and reduce the swelling.

Learn more about breast cancer. Having accurate information helps you to make the choices that are right for you. Turn to trustworthy sources for reliable information about breast cancer. The National Cancer Information Service (1-800-4-CANCER) is an excellent source of medical information. So are CancerCare's Telephone Education Workshops and publications, which provide the latest cancer information straight from top experts.

Seek support. Joining a support group gives you a chance to talk about your feelings and learn from other women going through similar situations. CancerCare's support groups are led by professional oncology social workers and available in person, online, and over the telephone. We also offer individual counseling. Speaking one on one with an oncology social worker can help you develop strategies for coping with some of the more complex emotions and concerns you may be facing.

CancerCare® Can Help

In addition to individual counseling and support groups, CancerCare's staff of professional oncology social workers provide education, financial assistance, practical help, and referrals. All our services are completely free of charge. To learn more, **1-800-813-HOPE (4673)** or visit www.cancercare.org.



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