

BREAST CANCER  CARE

Breast cancer and you

diagnosis, treatment and
the future



Breast Cancer Care is the UK's leading provider of information, practical assistance and emotional support for anyone affected by breast cancer. Every year we respond to over two million requests for support and information about breast cancer or breast health concerns. All our services are free.

We are committed to campaigning for better treatment and support for people with breast cancer and their families.

For more information visit www.breastcancercare.org.uk or call the Breast Cancer Care helpline free on **0808 800 6000** (textphone **0808 800 6001**). Calls may be monitored for training purposes. Confidentiality is maintained between callers and Breast Cancer Care.

A large print version of this booklet can be downloaded from our website, www.breastcancercare.org.uk. It is also available in Braille on request. Call 020 7384 4629 for more information.

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Introduction

This booklet is for anyone who is dealing with a diagnosis of breast cancer and its treatment. It discusses some of the emotional issues that may arise in the early weeks and months, and looks ahead to the time when you have finished your treatment and are looking to the future. You might find it helpful to read this together with our booklet **Treating breast cancer**, which describes the range of treatments you may be offered.

This booklet deals mainly with primary breast cancer (breast cancer that has not spread elsewhere in the body). If you have been diagnosed with secondary breast cancer (breast cancer that has spread to another part of the body) you may find our booklet **Secondary breast cancer** helpful.

If you have not yet reached the menopause you may also find it useful to read our **Younger women with breast cancer** booklet.

We hope that this booklet will address many of your concerns, but if you have further questions, require more information, or would like to know how others in your situation have been affected, you can call our free helpline on 0808 800 6000 (textphone 0808 800 6001). Breast Cancer Care's website also has a wide range of online forums for people with breast cancer. For further support, we can put you in touch with one of our trained volunteers. More details can be found in the back of this booklet.

Although we refer to 'women' throughout the text, men who have been diagnosed with the disease may also find the information relevant and helpful. Our publication **Men with breast cancer** has been written specifically for men and covers all aspects of the disease from a male perspective.

Diagnosis and the early days

Most women can vividly remember how they felt when they were first told they had breast cancer.

Whatever your initial feelings, you will probably go on to experience many different emotions.

You may be frightened that you are going to die or be uncertain about what the future holds. You may feel shocked or angry and ask 'why me?' or 'what have I done to deserve this?' You may feel relieved that the cancer has been identified and is going to be treated. You may feel guilty or unclean because you have cancer. You may feel determined not to let the cancer take over your life. You may feel disbelief because you don't feel ill, be anxious about your treatment or sad because your life is changing. On some days you may feel hopeful, on others very low or anxious.

How you feel is individual to you. There's no list of right or wrong, good or bad feelings to have and no order you must have them in.

More and more women are living long and full lives after breast cancer treatment. The way you feel about your cancer and how it has affected you and your body will change over time. The concerns you have when you are diagnosed can be



'I had a feeling that the lumps were malignant, but I was so shocked when the surgeon suggested bilateral mastectomies that I just wanted to run out of the room.'

Dianne

'I didn't have anyone with me at the time of diagnosis and I was stunned and not listening.' Helena

quite different from those at the end of treatment and different again years later.

How you react to your breast cancer can depend not only on you but also

on those around you. Some women feel they must keep putting on a brave face for family, friends and even for the doctors and nurses looking after them. Others prefer to let their feelings show and draw strength and support from people close to them.

Most people will meet a specialist breast care nurse during the early days of diagnosis and treatment. They are there to offer support and information to you and your family and often will be able to spend time with you, helping you understand your treatment options and supporting you as you go through treatment.

Some women want to learn everything they can about their breast cancer and what it means for their future. They want to know all the treatment options and to decide for themselves what to do next. Others prefer to leave it to their doctors to decide the best approach to treatment.

'I had been waiting almost two hours to see the consultant because of a mix up in appointment times and, when he told me I had cancer, I half stood up to see his notes as I was sure he'd mistaken me for someone else.' Jane

There's no right or wrong way to go about it. What matters is that you have as much information as you need and feel comfortable with the decisions you have made. Preparing questions for your doctor in advance can help you make sure you get the information you want.

'I was scared because, at the time, I had a 12 year old and a 9 year old and I was terrified I would not live to see them grow up.' Jeanette

See the *Finding out more* section on page 8 for suggestions on how to get the information you need.

Telling people



'I tried to hide at first, but then I told my friends and family. That way I got the support I needed. As I was the first person in my family to get breast cancer it was nice to know that everybody cared.' Rana

Talking about your cancer is part of the process of dealing with what has happened, so that you can start to think beyond the diagnosis.

Talking openly about your cancer may be difficult, especially at first, but it can make it easier for the people around you to support you. Your medical team and your family and friends need to know how you want to deal with things and how they can best respond to your needs. Some people will find it difficult to know what to say. If you can bring the subject up first it may help put them at their ease.

If you tell everyone you know, however, you might find yourself overwhelmed or shocked by their reactions. You may decide it suits you better to tell only a few people. Who you tell and how you tell them is up to you.

Telling people the basic facts about your diagnosis and options for treatment can be a good way to begin and may lead naturally to talking about how you are feeling. Asking someone you trust to tell other people may take away the burden of having to keep going over the same ground. On the other hand, it may be that the more you talk about it, the easier it becomes.

If you have younger children, deciding what to tell them may be one of the most difficult things you have to face. It's probably best to be open and honest as it can be less frightening for them to know what's going on even if they don't fully understand. Our booklet **Talking with your children about breast cancer** may help you decide what to tell them and how best to do it.

'There were just a few people outside the family who I wanted to tell at first. As I got used to the fact of having breast cancer, I was more comfortable with other people knowing.' Dianne

'I have never kept my breast cancer a secret. I feel it is important that people (especially my children) know exactly what has happened. The things they imagine could be worse than the truth and, if it was bad, I'd rather they didn't hear it "on the grapevine".'
Rachel

Finding out more

It can be very difficult to take everything in when you first hear you have cancer. You may need help to get the facts straight and to ask the questions that are important to you. You may need your family and friends to give you breathing space to take in what is happening.

It is important that any information you receive is accurate and applies to you. A treatment that is right for one woman with breast cancer may not be right for another. There is a lot of information available, especially on the Internet, but while some websites are excellent sources of information, others are less reliable. The Breast Cancer Care website, www.breastcancercare.org.uk, is a good place to start.

The people who have the most information about your cancer are the medical and nursing team looking after you. If you have questions, it may help to make a list of them, with the most important ones at the top. Ask whoever you feel most comfortable with – your specialist, your breast care nurse, or someone else in the treatment team. If they don't know the answer they should be able to find it out for you.

Most cancer outpatient clinics provide a variety of information, so it's worth asking what's available. Breast Cancer Care has booklets and factsheets on all aspects of breast cancer and its treatment and you can call our helpline on 0808 800 6000 for additional information and support. You can also use the Ask the nurse email service on our website and a specialist nurse will respond to your question, usually within two working days.

Making decisions about treatment

Once your breast cancer has been diagnosed and you have had some time to absorb this news, you and your doctors will want to move ahead with treatment. That doesn't mean you need to rush your decisions about what to do. A few days spent making sure you are satisfied with plans for your treatment shouldn't make any difference and may help you to feel more in control of what's happening to you.

Your doctors will talk to you about your treatment options and the advantages and disadvantages of each. You can then take some time to talk things over before you make a decision.

Talk to whoever you feel comfortable with – it might be your partner, a close friend, or your breast care nurse. Breast Cancer Care's helpline staff can discuss your options and refer you to other organisations and resources for information and help. The Ask the nurse email service as well as the Support for you and forum sections of our website may also help you to make your decision. See the *Beyond this booklet* section on page 30 for more details. It is important that you also talk to someone who is able to advise you on your treatment options, such as your specialist or breast care nurse, before you make your decision.

Most women are recommended to have a combination of therapies. These may include:

- surgery
- radiotherapy
- chemotherapy
- hormone therapy.

The different treatment options are discussed fully in our booklet **Treating breast cancer**. You may also be asked to take part in a clinical trial. See our factsheet **Clinical trials and breast cancer** for more information.

Some women may think about not having one, or any, of the treatments offered. This may be because they think the treatment will do them no good or that it will seriously affect their quality of life, or they may simply be frightened. Even if you think you don't want to accept the treatments being offered, do think carefully about the alternatives available to you before making a final decision.

The effects of treatment

The treatments you have for your breast cancer are almost certain to affect how you look and feel in some way.

Wanting to look and feel good isn't vanity, it's part of being human. On some days we feel better about ourselves than on others – whether or not we have cancer.

Many of us buy clothes, wear make-up, treat ourselves to a special day out or a holiday to make ourselves look and feel good. Deep down we may know that who we are is far more important than how we look. But that can be hard to hang on to when you're feeling unwell and vulnerable.

Some of the effects of treatment can be prevented or minimised, some will be temporary, but a few won't go away.



'I felt devastated and mutilated but the needs of my family drove me to put it all behind me and get on with my life. I went for the prettiest bras and underwear I could find and I made a conscious promise to myself never to let my appearance go.' Win

'Before I went for chemotherapy, I would dress up: full make-up, smart clothes, the works. It was a bit of a false face, but it did make me feel less of a patient, and more of a person.' Jane

'My husband was inclined to treat me as though I might break. I had to assure him that he wasn't hurting me and that I needed to be hugged and made love to – he soon got the message.' Win

Feeling upset or angry about changes to your body during and after breast cancer treatment is perfectly normal and it can take you a long time to adjust to them.

Don't be afraid to ask for reassurance from those who care about you.

Talk about your fears and try not to distance yourself from people. Tell them whether you want them to touch you, hug you or just be with you.

Sometimes partners also have difficulty dealing with what is happening. They may become distant or cope by being very matter of fact. This doesn't mean that they don't care or are rejecting you, but they may not know what they should do. You and your partner may find our booklet **In it together: for partners of people with breast cancer** useful.

Talking to each other about how you both feel may be enough. In some cases emotional or sexual problems can arise which may be more difficult to sort out. If this happens, you may want to seek help together, such as counselling. Your breast care nurse or GP will be able to advise you on counselling or you could contact an organisation like Relate. See the *Beyond this booklet* section on page 30 for more information.

'My husband and I grew closer and we feel we've been mutually supportive during a very rough time.'
Dianne

Changes to your appearance

Most women have some form of surgery as part of their treatment. Whether you have a lump or the entire breast removed (lumpectomy or mastectomy), the first time you look at your body after the operation may not be easy. The area is likely to be bruised and swollen. Getting plenty of information about your operation beforehand can help prepare you. See the *Finding out more* section on page 8.

'A few weeks after my mastectomy I asked my two daughters (aged 18 and 7) if they'd like to see what it looked like. They nervously agreed and were absolutely amazed. Their response was "is that all?". They had imagined a huge crater instead of a neat horizontal scar.' Stephanie

Your nurse will probably encourage you to look at your scar before you leave hospital. Some women prefer to do this alone, others like to have a partner, friend or family member with them. Whatever you decide, try not to leave it too long before you look. The more you delay, the harder it may be.

Surgery doesn't affect how some women feel about themselves, but many others find the changes difficult to accept. Particularly at first, you may feel very self-conscious, for example, if you are in a communal changing room. Some women feel lop-sided or incomplete. Your confidence and self-esteem may be affected and you may feel unfeminine or unattractive.

Because the way we feel about ourselves can be closely linked to the way we look, many women want to restore their natural appearance after breast cancer surgery. Some women feel that breast reconstruction has improved their outlook and enhanced the quality of their lives. Others feel just as comfortable wearing a prosthesis. Some women decide not to have reconstruction or wear a prosthesis. It really is your choice.

'I felt an incomplete woman, but my dear husband assured me that he loved me and he'd rather have me without a breast than a breast without me.' Rana

If you are considering any of these options you may find it useful to read our booklets **Breast reconstruction** and **A confident choice: breast prostheses, bras and clothes after surgery**.

Depending on your treatment you may see other changes in your appearance such as skin changes, hair loss, weight loss, weight gain or lymphoedema (swelling, usually to the arm, caused by a build-up of lymph fluid in the tissues).

Even though the effects may be temporary, they can be very upsetting and again affect the way you feel about yourself, not least because they are an outward sign of a life-threatening illness.

In most cases something can be done to help you deal with these problems. For example:

- Your chemotherapy nurse can advise you if you are likely to lose some or all of your hair and order a wig for you in advance. For more information see our **Chemotherapy for breast cancer** and **Breast cancer and hair loss** booklets.
- If you develop lymphoedema, your breast care nurse or lymphoedema specialist will be able to advise you about different treatments and how to care for your arm, for example by doing a range of exercises and wearing a compression sleeve. For more information see our booklet **Living with lymphoedema after breast cancer treatment**.

'I told my hairdresser when I started my chemo and we cut my hair quite short so when my hair thinned, it didn't seem so noticeable.' Jane

Fatigue

Fatigue is something that most women will experience at some point during or after their treatment and it can last for weeks or even months. Fatigue is different from normal tiredness and is more extreme and unpredictable. It can really make a difference to how you feel and how you cope with everyday life. Where possible, try to take things easy and don't be too hard on yourself if you can't do as much as you used to. Pace yourself if you can; for example, by taking up offers of help with shopping, transport, childcare or housework. If you work, you might be able to work part time for a while. Gentle exercise can really help improve feelings of fatigue, even if it feels like it would be impossible.

You can get more information about dealing with fatigue by calling the Breast Cancer Care helpline or using the Ask the nurse email service on our website. Cancerbackup also produces a booklet on cancer related fatigue and how to cope with it. For more details see the *Beyond this booklet* section on page 30.

Menopausal symptoms

Breast cancer treatments such as chemotherapy and hormone therapy can cause menopausal symptoms. These are generally temporary but sometimes they can be permanent. They can have a considerable impact on how you feel. The symptoms are often more intense than when menopause occurs naturally.

You may experience symptoms such as hot flushes, night sweats, vaginal dryness, poor concentration and a general feeling of not being on top of things. For more information, see our factsheet **Menopausal symptoms and breast cancer**.

'I had horrendous hot flushes. The most helpful thing was to wear natural fabrics and to wear layers that I could strip off and then pile on again. Just as I thought I couldn't bear it any more, they began to subside.' Stephanie

You may find that you lose interest in sex, partly because of how you feel generally but also because of the physical side effects of some treatments. For more information, see our booklet **Sexuality, intimacy and breast cancer**.

Don't be afraid to talk to your specialist or breast care nurse about any problems you have, psychological or physical, as there is a lot that can be done to help.

Some breast cancer treatments, such as chemotherapy, can bring on an early menopause and affect fertility so that you may not be able to have children. If you want to have children, or haven't yet completed your family, this can be a devastating prospect and particularly hard to bear when you are already dealing with breast cancer. If this is happening to you, remember that you don't have to cope on your own. Your cancer specialist and breast care nurse, as well as Breast Cancer Care's helpline and website, can support you and advise on specialist help available, such as counselling. For more information, see our factsheet **Fertility issues and breast cancer treatment**.

Worries and fears

It is natural to be anxious when you are dealing with a life-threatening illness. Stress and tension can make you touchy and irritable, stop you eating and sleeping properly, make your muscles tense and your heart race. Concentrating may become difficult. Sometimes anxiety can become so overwhelming that it leads to panic attacks, causing further fear and worry.

Realising that there is a problem and going in search of help are two big steps in the right direction. Friends and family can offer support, but you may also want to talk to someone who is specially trained in helping people deal with emotional problems. This may be a counsellor linked to your GP's practice, or a psychiatrist or clinical psychologist at your hospital who has previously worked with cancer patients. There are a variety of approaches that may be used to help you.



'I would lie awake at night worrying about my children, aged one and three at the time. It was two years before I began to sleep properly again. When the children started school, I slept every school day afternoon for a year or so – just catching up on the accumulated exhaustion.' Rachel

You may be recommended practical techniques, some of which you can learn and practise by yourself. These can help you feel more in control of your life.

Managing anxiety

Described below are some therapies and techniques that may help you cope at a difficult time. Remember that there are many others and you may need to try a few before you find one that is right for you. Complementary therapies can also be used to treat other side effects of breast cancer treatment. See our **Complementary therapies** publication for more details.

Cognitive therapy

Many people find that they automatically think the worst when they are diagnosed with cancer. Cognitive therapy can help you see things differently. You are not expected to see everything through rose-tinted glasses but to look at your responses to everyday events and question whether there may be alternative ways of thinking about things. As a first step

you might be asked to keep a diary of things that happen and your thought processes in how you respond to them. Using this you can begin to see whether you may be focusing on pessimistic rather than optimistic thoughts and if there is a more balanced way to see things.

‘I was anxious at first and could not sleep. I used to imagine my children without me. I felt depressed and did not want to do anything.’ Rana

Distraction

Distraction involves learning to focus on the things around you so that you can shut out negative thoughts. For example, you may use it to help you cope with a stressful situation like a hospital appointment by looking around and describing the surroundings to yourself in detail, drawing your attention away from the thoughts that are making you anxious.

'I tried many different complementary therapies – it was part of taking back some control of my treatment. Visualisation was one of the best and helped me through some low times.' Jane

Relaxation, visualisation and meditation

Used separately or together, these techniques aim to reduce stress and tension and relax the body and mind. They can be used regularly to promote wellbeing or to help you cope with stressful situations such as hospital appointments or treatment sessions. You can practise relaxation using books or tapes at home or by going to a class.

Visualisation is often linked to relaxation and means using your mind to create pictures. For example, you may use it to help you relax by imagining yourself bathed in white light that leaves you feeling healthy and purified. On another level, you might use visualisation to help you make changes in your life and improvements in your health, for example by seeing the chemotherapy drugs as a waterfall washing away the cancer cells, or picturing yourself doing something you enjoy after your treatment is finished.

Meditation aims to help people quieten their minds, which can lead to a deep sense of relaxation. Meditation techniques include breathing awareness or visual imagery that aim to leave you in a peaceful and calm state.

Gentle forms of exercise such as yoga and tai chi, which include relaxation and meditation techniques as well as physical exercise, can also be helpful. They generally look at posture, breathing and deliberate exercise movements to improve balance and strength and promote relaxation.



'I was feeling very grey and went for counselling. I needed to talk to someone I wasn't trying to protect. It was very powerful and I felt a great inner shift take place. It needed nurturing but I actually ended up feeling better than I had for years!' Stephanie

Low mood

Some women find that they become depressed because of breast cancer. This can happen at any stage during your treatment or even some time after treatment is finished. You may find yourself stuck, unable to get beyond thinking that you are going to die or that you will not live to see your children grow up. You may feel that all the enjoyment has gone out of life and you can't imagine things ever getting better.

Realising that there is a problem and getting help is the most important thing you can do. While it is normal to feel low or depressed at any point during your treatment, if you find that these negative thoughts are

interfering with your life, if they don't go away within a couple of weeks, or if they keep on coming back, it might indicate that you are medically depressed.

You may find your habits change and you are sleeping or eating more or less than normal. You may feel numb, empty or helpless. You may lack energy and struggle to do what you normally do, even just getting up in the morning. You may be very irritable or find yourself crying at the slightest thing.

You don't have to ignore these feelings and struggle on. There's nothing to be ashamed of in admitting that you are depressed, or finding it hard to cope, and that you need professional help. Some people may find it hard to seek professional advice but it can help to relieve these symptoms and allow you to regain control of your life.

There are many effective methods to help with depressed mood. 'Talking' treatments such as cognitive behaviour therapy are becoming more available either through your GP or the cancer centre where you are being treated. Further information is available from the British Association for Cognitive and Behavioural Psychotherapy (contact details at the back of this booklet). While many people do not like the idea of taking tablets, a short course of anti-depressant drugs may be recommended. It usually takes two to four weeks before you notice the effects and start to feel better, although

'My mind became numb and muddled and I didn't sleep through the night for about 18 months. I saw a psychiatrist who put me on a course of anti-depressants, which helped me re-establish my sleep pattern. It was difficult to cope and I tried to carry on as though everything was fine. Once I started sleeping again, I felt better.' Dianne

it sometimes takes up to six weeks. You may need to take the drugs for four to six months. Taking anti-depressants doesn't mean you will become dependent on them, but they can be an extra support during a particularly difficult period.

Your cancer specialist and breast care nurse will be able to talk to you about depression and counselling services, and you can also call the Breast Cancer Care helpline or visit our website to get more information.

Support groups

For some people, meeting with others who are in a similar situation can help to decrease feelings of anxiety, isolation or fear. Breast cancer support groups can provide a sense of community and an opportunity to share your experiences and learn different ways of dealing with problems.

'I joined a support group and I had the help of a very lovely lady who had gone through the experience the year before. She was great. I remember when I was scared to look at myself after surgery, she was the one who helped.'

Jeannette

Support groups aren't for everyone. You may prefer to talk to someone on a one-to-one basis. Breast Cancer Care may be able to put you in touch with someone who has been in a similar situation and is trained to offer support.

To find out about a support group in your area or this one-to-one support, ask your breast care nurse or phone Breast Cancer Care's helpline.

Breast Cancer Care also runs forums and regular Live chat sessions on our website. These let people affected by breast cancer talk about their experiences and give and receive support and information. For more information, see *Beyond this booklet* on page 30.

Looking to the future



'I had a tremendous feeling of "is that it?". It was a huge anti-climax, almost anger, that no one really knew what would happen now. There was a great expectation from family and friends that everything was OK now and I was "over it". But I didn't share those feelings.' Jane

The end of treatment

The end of treatment can be a strange time. Although you'll be glad it's over, it may seem like an anti-climax. It is important to give yourself plenty of time to convalesce, recuperate and adjust. This can take longer than expected, despite the desire to put it all in the past.

Once the treatment has finished, you and the people close to you may be expecting things to get back to normal. But that can be easier said than done. After what you've been through, it may not be easy to just go back to working or looking after the family as if nothing has happened. People will be glad you're

'They thought that I should be back to normal and this was the last thing that I was feeling. In the early days I wasn't driving and went everywhere with someone else. That made me feel very childlike. To get back in my car and go where I needed by myself was very liberating.' Dianne

back, but some things may have changed. For example, if you work, new systems may have been introduced while you were away. If you have a partner or children at home, they may be less dependent.

You may need to learn how to enjoy yourself again. Plan ahead for outings and treats; reward yourself for making progress. Don't be afraid to book holidays or arrange visits to friends or family.

There will be times when your mind wanders and you think about your cancer and its treatment. If there have been permanent changes in the way you look or feel, you'll probably need to grieve for what has been lost. This is perfectly natural and you don't have to push such thoughts away. It can take a long time to get used to the changes that have taken place and to adjust to life after your breast cancer treatment.

Even though you will have regular follow-up appointments, it is important to be breast aware after your treatment. You should check your breasts from time to time, just as anyone who hasn't had breast cancer is encouraged to do. You will need to become familiar with the shape, texture and feel of your breasts following treatment and learn what is now normal for you.

You may be apprehensive about looking at and feeling your breasts for changes, particularly at a time when you are trying to put your experience of breast cancer behind you, but it will enable you to notice any unusual changes early. It is important to remember that most changes to the breast will not be

'I've had a number of scares over the years, each of which has turned out to be nothing. I've learned to wait a bit to see if the symptom resolves itself and then to go and get it checked out. I try to stop my mind whirling off into the future, but it's hard.' Stephanie

related to breast cancer. If you notice any changes or are concerned in any way, see your GP or specialist without delay. Breast Cancer Care's **Breast awareness** booklet provides more information about being breast aware.

Has it really gone?

Nearly everyone who has been treated for cancer has niggling doubts about whether the disease really has gone away or whether it could come back. At first, every odd ache or pain may frighten you. But, as time passes, you'll come to accept minor symptoms for what they are in most cases – warning signs of a cold or flu or the result of over-exerting yourself – just those unexplainable ups and downs we all get.

Some events may prove particularly stressful – the days or weeks leading up to your check-up, the discovery that a friend or relative has been diagnosed with cancer, the news that



'When I was diagnosed with breast cancer my daughter was only 12. I never thought I would live to see her grow up much less hold one of her offspring.' Jeanette

'I went to New York with my sisters and had a fantastic time. I really was glad to be alive and to have come through the treatment.' Dianne

someone you met while having treatment is ill again or has died.

We all deal with such anxieties in our own way, and there are no easy answers. But keeping quiet about them, not wanting to bother anyone, is probably not the best approach. Just as talking about your diagnosis and treatment may have helped you through the early days, talking about your fears and worries may help you later on.

'My diagnosis was over 10 years ago. We used to have a toast on each anniversary. Everyone else has moved on and forgotten the date now. But I haven't. Each year, I raise a glass to myself and say, "Yes!"'

Stephanie

'I've already dealt with the cancer coming back, but somehow my second mastectomy was easier to accept. I was older and I knew I'd got over it before. I do sometimes think it might come back somewhere else, but after 80 wonderful years I have learned to let the future take care of itself.' Win

What next?

'I feel much more a sense of living for the now. I don't make great 10-year plans or think about my children as adults. I do try to do things I enjoy and try not to be involved with negative pessimistic people.' Jane

Months or years after your breast cancer, you and those who know you well will not have forgotten that you had cancer. But it won't come up in everyday thoughts and conversations as it once did. It doesn't mean that family and friends don't care, just that life has moved on for all of you.

People you meet since your cancer may not be aware that you had the disease, and it's up to you to decide if and how much you want to tell them.

Meeting someone new with whom you might have a sexual relationship may be a concern. You may worry about how and when to tell them you have had breast cancer or about how they may react to the way your body looks. Like any new friendship, you give and accept information slowly as you build trust between you. But holding back too long can cause problems as well. If you are finding it difficult, you might try

'I am not as strong. I don't lift weights or do heavy housework, decorating or gardening. I have put on weight and loss of libido is a problem too. I feel sad for the way things have changed but, as time goes on, I feel it is easier to accept the changes. The problems fade into the background of a busy life.'
Dianne

'I feel that the experience of breast cancer will always be with me. I can never forget that it happened. But I have come through it, and it is a part of me. In many ways I have been strengthened by it.' Rachel

working out what you want to say beforehand, or even practising with someone else first.

Many people say that having cancer, a heart attack or other serious illness changes their life. It makes them take a step back and think about what they are doing and what is truly important to them.

We all have ideas and plans that never quite get to the top of the list – to travel, to learn a new skill, or to do something you've only ever dreamed of. But with your treatment behind you, you might want to make one or two of those dreams a reality.



'Life is for living to the full. I treat myself very well and don't feel guilty for spending time or money on myself.'
Helena

'It was like a watershed in my life. With help, I was able to look at how I was leading my life and how I saw myself. I now take much greater care of myself and have far greater confidence. It started a whole new phase of my life which is fulfilling and exciting.' Stephanie

Beyond this booklet

Further support from Breast Cancer Care

Free telephone helpline 0808 800 6000 (textphone 0808 800 6001)

Our helpline provides information and support for anyone affected by breast cancer. Everyone on our helpline either has personal experience of breast cancer or is a breast care nurse. The team comes from a variety of backgrounds, so callers get to talk to someone who understands the issues they're facing.

The team is able to talk about clinical, medical and emotional issues surrounding breast cancer and breast health. Everyone on the helpline has an excellent knowledge of breast cancer issues and receives daily information on new developments. They can talk through the complexities of different treatments to help you understand your options and explain the best way for you to get treatment.

Volunteer support

Many people who have breast cancer find it helpful to talk to someone who has been in a similar situation. Breast Cancer Care's peer support service puts you in touch with someone who has personal experience of breast cancer and has been trained to listen and offer emotional support. You can talk to someone at any stage – whenever you feel it would help. Call our helpline or visit our website for more information about this free service. You can also contact our centres to access this service (contact details on the inside back cover of this booklet).

Courses and activities

Our courses and activities for people with breast cancer aim to provide information and support and give you the chance to meet others in a similar situation. Events include Healthy Living Days, Younger Women's Forums, Living with Breast Cancer courses and informal talks on specific topics. For more information contact your nearest Breast Cancer Care centre or call our helpline.

Online forums and Live chat

The Breast Cancer Care website hosts chat forums covering all aspects of the disease and its treatment. This service is available 24 hours a day and allows you to talk to people in a similar situation and to share your thoughts and feelings.

All forum users post their messages and responses at any time, however the regular Live chat sessions take place among users who are all logged on at the same time. They are hosted by Breast Cancer Care staff or a clinical specialist and give you the opportunity to discuss anything related to your diagnosis. Visit www.breastcancercare.org.uk for more details.

Ask the nurse

This is another service on the Breast Cancer Care website. You can email a question on any breast cancer or breast health issue and our team of specialist nurses will reply within two working days. The service is strictly confidential.

Publications

Breast Cancer Care produces a wide range of publications providing information for anyone affected by breast cancer. All of our publications are regularly reviewed by healthcare professionals and people affected by breast cancer. You can order our publications by using our order form, which can be requested from our helpline. All our publications can also be downloaded from our website.

Further reading

Val Sampson and Debbie Fenlon

The Breast Cancer Book

Vermilion, London 2002

ISBN 0091884535

A comprehensive overview of breast cancer and treatments from a patient and her breast care nurse.

Coping with fatigue

Cancerbackup

London, 2002

ISBN 1904370233

This booklet looks at cancer-related fatigue and ways of coping with it.

Useful addresses

Cancer organisations

Cancerbackup

3 Bath Place, Rivington Street , London EC2A 3JR

Office: 020 7696 9003

Freephone helpline: 0808 800 1234 (Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm)

Email: info@cancerbackup.org

Website: www.cancerbackup.org.uk

Cancerbackup is a national information and support charity for people affected by cancer. Services include a helpline, staffed by specialist cancer information nurses, a website, cancer information booklets and local information centres. All Cancerbackup services are free to people affected by cancer.

Cancer Counselling Trust

1 Noel Road, London N1 8HQ

Telephone: 020 7704 1137

Email: support@cctrust.org.uk

Website: www.cctrust.org.uk

The Cancer Counselling Trust serves cancer patients, their families, friends and carers who seek counselling to help them through the difficult issues caused by a cancer diagnosis. It is committed to the provision of counselling to all who require it. Clients are seen on a self-referral basis at any stage of the disease. If a patient or carer is unable to travel to the Trust's premises, telephone counselling can be arranged on a regular basis.

Macmillan Cancer Support

89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7UQ

Telephone: 020 7840 7840

Macmillan CancerLine: 0808 808 2020 (Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm)

Textphone: 0808 808 0121

Email: cancerline@macmillan.org.uk

Website: www.macmillan.org.uk

Macmillan Cancer Support is helping people who are living with cancer through the provision of immediate practical and emotional support. Specialist services include Macmillan nurses and doctors, cancer centres, a range of cancer information and direct financial help. The Macmillan CancerLine provides information and emotional support. Textphone available.

Other organisations

British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies (BABCP)

The Globe Centre, PO Box 9, Accrington BB5 0XB

Telephone: 01254 875277

Email: babcp@babcp.com

Website: www.babcp.com

**British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
(BACP)**

BACP House, 35-37 Albert Street,
Rugby, Warwickshire CV21 2SG

Telephone: 0870 443 5252

Email: bacp@bacp.co.uk

Website: www.counselling.co.uk

BACP aims to promote counselling and psychotherapy and raise standards. Produces a directory of counsellors and psychotherapists, also available online, and will send a list of counsellors and psychotherapists in your area.

Mind

15-19 Broadway, London E15 4BQ

Telephone: 020 8519 2122

MindinfoLine: 0845 766 0163

Email: contact@mind.org.uk

Website: www.mind.org.uk

Mind is an organisation for people who are concerned about their mental and emotional health. Its services include a confidential helpline, drop-in centres, counselling and a range of publications offering coping strategies for life.

Relate

Relate Central Office, Herbert Gray College,
Little Church Street, Rugby CV21 3AP

Telephone: 0845 456 1310

Email: enquiries@relate.org.uk

Website: www.relate.org.uk

Relate offers advice, relationship counselling, sex therapy, workshops, mediation, consultations and support face-to-face, by phone and through their website.

Women's Health Concern

Whitehall House, 41 Whitehall, London SW1A 2BY

Telephone: 020 7451 1377

Fax: 020 7925 1505

Email: info@womens-health-concern.org

Website: www.womens-health-concern.org

Women's Health Concern is a charitable organisation which aims to help educate and support women with their healthcare by providing unbiased, accurate information.

Central Office

Breast Cancer Care

Kiln House 210 New Kings Road

London SW6 4NZ

Telephone 020 7384 2984

Fax 020 7384 3387

Email info@breastcancercare.org.uk

Centres

Breast Cancer Care Scotland

Telephone 0845 077 1892

Email sco@breastcancercare.org.uk

Breast Cancer Care Cymru/Wales

Telephone 0845 077 1894

Email cym@breastcancercare.org.uk

Breast Cancer Care North & Midlands

Telephone 0845 077 1893

Email nrc@breastcancercare.org.uk

Breast Cancer Care London & South

Telephone 0845 077 1895

Email src@breastcancercare.org.uk

For all breast cancer or breast health concerns, call our free, national helpline on 0808 800 6000 (textphone 0808 800 6001) or visit www.breastcancercare.org.uk.

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Breast Cancer Care relies on donations from the public to provide its services free to clients. If you would like to make a donation, please send your cheque to: Breast Cancer Care, Freepost Lon 644, London SW6 4BR. Or donate via our website at www.breastcancercare.org.uk.

Breast Cancer Care is the UK's leading provider of information, practical assistance and emotional support for anyone affected by breast cancer. Every year we respond to over two million requests for support and information about breast cancer or breast health concerns. All our services are free.

We are committed to campaigning for better treatment and support for people with breast cancer and their families.

For more information visit www.breastcancercare.org.uk or call the Breast Cancer Care helpline free on **0808 800 6000** (textphone **0808 800 6001**).