

**BREAST
CANCER
NOW**

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Moving Forward™

After breast cancer

SUPPORTING YOU NOW

Call our helpline on **0808 800 6000** or visit **breastcancernow.org**

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CONTENTS

About Moving Forward	4
Managing physical side effects after treatment	6
Recurrence	20
Coping emotionally	27
Diet, exercise and physical wellbeing	34
Relationships, intimacy and sex	40
Work and finances	45
Getting support	49

About Moving Forward

This booklet contains practical tips and information to help you adjust to life after breast cancer treatment.

Lots of people expect to feel relieved and ready to move on with their lives once their hospital treatments have finished. But it can be a difficult and emotional time for many reasons.

Finishing treatment can mean leaving behind the routine and support you've got used to. Having much less contact with your treatment team can leave you feeling isolated.

At the same time, family and friends may have moved on and expect you to do the same.

You may have focused on getting through the treatment and only have time to reflect on how your diagnosis has affected you once treatment has finished.

Whether you're coming to the end of treatment or your diagnosis of breast cancer was a few years ago, this booklet is for you.

How to use this booklet

You may want to read the whole booklet at once. Or you can just look at the information that's most useful to you. It's designed to be easy to dip in and out of.

This booklet does not cover every topic in detail. So throughout we recommend other free Breast Cancer Now publications, which cover topics in more depth.

You may want to show the booklet to your family or friends to help them understand how you're feeling.

If you have any questions or would like to talk about your concerns, you can call our free helpline on **0808 800 6000**.

INFO

Our Moving Forward courses

We know it's not "back to normal" after treatment for primary breast cancer.

We get it. And we can help. At our Moving Forward courses, you'll meet other people who've been through it too, who know what it's like. And you'll get the tools to help you feel in control, so you can move forward with your life.

Find out more at **breastcancernow.org/all-services**

Managing physical side effects after treatment

Ongoing side effects of treatment, like fatigue, pain and menopausal symptoms, can affect your daily life and might leave you feeling low. They can be a reminder of your breast cancer, which may make it harder to adjust.

You might want to talk to your treatment team or GP about any side effects you're having. They may be able to suggest ways to manage them.

New or unusual symptoms



It's important to speak to your GP or treatment team about any symptoms that are new or unusual for you or ongoing.

See pages 23 to 25 for more information about signs and symptoms to be aware of after treatment.

Extreme tiredness (fatigue)

Fatigue is extreme tiredness that does not go away with rest or sleep. It's a very common side effect of breast cancer treatment and may last for weeks or months after your treatment has finished.

Fatigue can be made worse by worry and anxiety, or if you're having trouble sleeping.

If you think you have fatigue, tell your GP or treatment team. They can assess you and offer advice on how to manage your energy levels.

You can find more information on our website or by calling our helpline on **0808 800 6000**. Macmillan Cancer Support also produces information on coping with fatigue.

Tips for managing fatigue

Talk to your GP

Tell your GP or breast care nurse how you're feeling. Your fatigue may have a treatable cause, such as anaemia which may be treated with iron supplements.

Use a fatigue diary

This involves recording your level of fatigue every day from 1 (no fatigue) to 10 (extreme fatigue). It can help you plan activities, especially those that require more energy.

Try to be active

There's strong evidence that regular moderate exercise, such as walking, cycling or swimming, can help reduce fatigue.

Rest, but limit naps

Try to rest between your daily activities but limit the number of naps you have. Keep naps to less than half an hour and avoid taking them in the late afternoon, so you sleep at night.

Try relaxation

Use relaxation techniques to help you relax and regain energy. There are many good online video tutorials, relaxation CDs or apps that can guide you through different techniques.

Stay hydrated

Drink plenty of fluids to keep hydrated. Being dehydrated can make you tired.

Eat well

Make the most of the times when your appetite is good and choose foods that give you energy over time, like nuts and wholegrains.

Ask for help

Often people want to help but do not know what you need, so let them know. And accept offers of practical help from others where possible, for example help with household chores or getting to appointments.

Get support

You could try joining a local support group if there's one in your area, or having some individual counselling. There's some evidence that being well supported may help reduce fatigue.

Lymphoedema

Lymphoedema is swelling of the arm, hand, breast or chest area. It's caused by a build-up of fluid in the body's tissues.

It can happen because of damage to the lymphatic system, for example because of surgery or radiotherapy to the lymph nodes under the arm and surrounding area.

Lymphoedema may develop soon after surgery, radiotherapy or sometimes chemotherapy. But it can also happen many years later and may be triggered by a skin infection (cellulitis) or an injury.

Lymphoedema only affects the side of the body that was treated. If you had treatment to both sides, then both arms will be at risk.

Reducing your risk of lymphoedema

Maintain a healthy weight

Maintaining a healthy weight can reduce your risk of developing lymphoedema.

Use your "at-risk" arm normally

Keeping your arm and shoulder moving can help reduce your risk of lymphoedema.

Care for your skin

To help reduce your risk of developing an infection:

- Moisturise your skin daily to prevent it becoming dry and cracked
- Use a high-factor sunscreen to protect against sunburn
- Apply insect repellent containing at least 50% DEET to prevent bites and stings
- Wear gloves when washing up, gardening or when taking hot dishes out of the oven
- Take care when cutting your nails
- Take care if removing underarm hair or hair on your arm – an electric razor or hair removal cream are less likely to damage the skin (use hair removal cream with caution after patch testing)

For more tips on reducing your risk, see our booklet

Reducing the risk of lymphoedema.

Signs of infection



Contact your GP, breast care nurse or treatment team as soon as possible if you have:

- Redness or a rash in white skin, which may look purple, grey or like a subtly darker skin tone in black or brown skin
- Heat
- Swelling
- Tenderness or pain
- Flu-like symptoms

Symptoms of lymphoedema

Contact your breast care nurse, treatment team or GP as soon as possible if you notice any of the following symptoms.

Swelling

The most common symptom of lymphoedema is swelling.

The swelling may:

- Come and go to begin with
- Be worse towards the end of the day
- Be worse after strenuous activities or in hot weather

Clothing (particularly your bra) and jewellery (especially rings and bracelets) may feel much tighter than usual.

Tightness

The arm or breast can feel tight when there is extra fluid in the tissues. You may feel tightness in the arm even if your arm doesn't look swollen.

Discomfort

Discomfort can be an early sign of lymphoedema. You might have the following in the arm, breast or chest area:

- A dull ache
- Heaviness
- Tingling
- Numbness

Dry skin

The skin is stretched when there's swelling and can become dry and flaky and sometimes feel itchy. Dry, cracked skin increases the risk of cellulitis (a sudden infection of the skin and the tissue underneath it).

Arm stiffness

If your arm is swollen, it may limit movement in the joints.

Living with lymphoedema

Lymphoedema is a long-term condition, which means once it has developed it can be controlled but is unlikely to ever go away completely.

If you have lymphoedema, you can read more about how it can be managed in our booklet

Managing lymphoedema after breast cancer.

INFO

When hair grows back

Hair loss or thinning are common side effects of chemotherapy and some other cancer treatments like hormone therapy and targeted therapies.

How quickly hair grows back will vary from person to person. But most people will have a full covering 3 to 6 months after treatment finishes. Sometimes the regrowth is patchy. The hair may be weak and fragile or softer to begin with, but over time the condition and texture of the hair should become stronger.

Hair can sometimes grow back different to how it was before treatment. For example, the colour or texture may change, or it might be curlier or straighter than before.

Hair loss from breast cancer treatment is almost always temporary, but in rare cases it can be long-term or permanent. For more information, see our booklet **Breast cancer and hair loss**.

Tips for taking care of your hair as it grows back

- Use a mild, unperfumed shampoo and conditioner
- Try not to wash your hair more than twice a week or less than once every 10 days, and use warm water rather than hot
- Pat your hair dry rather than rubbing it
- Brush or comb your hair gently with a soft hairbrush or wide tooth comb
- Gently massage your scalp to improve the blood supply to the hair follicles
- Wear a soft cotton, bamboo, satin or silk cap to sleep in, or use a silk or satin pillowcase

The organisation Cancer Hair Care (cancerhaircare.co.uk) has more information on caring for your hair after treatment.

Menopausal symptoms

Some breast cancer treatments cause menopausal symptoms.

Common menopausal symptoms can include:

- Hot flushes and night sweats
- Vaginal dryness
- Mood changes
- Decreased sex drive
- Weight gain
- Joint pain
- Changes to skin and hair

You may find some of these symptoms manageable, but they can be difficult to cope with and can affect your quality of life.

Tips for coping with hot flushes and night sweats

Hot flushes, sometimes called vasomotor symptoms (VMS), are the most commonly reported menopausal symptom caused by breast cancer treatments.

- Keep a battery-operated or paper fan with you at all times
- Wear layers so you can remove clothing when a flush starts
- Wear loose-fitting clothing made from natural fibres
- Use a silk pillowcase, a specially designed pillow that stays cool or a cooling scarf
- Always keep a bottle of water with you
- Avoid or reduce caffeine, alcohol and spicy foods
- Carry a water spray to use on your face or wrists to cool you down

Treatments for hot flushes are available, including non-hormonal prescription drugs.

Some people find therapies such as menopause-specific cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and complementary therapies like acupuncture helpful.

While hormone replacement therapy (HRT) can help with the symptoms of menopause, it's not usually recommended for women who've had breast cancer.

You can speak to your GP or treatment team about options for managing hot flushes.

Menopause information

INFO

You can find out more about managing menopausal symptoms in our booklet

Menopausal symptoms and breast cancer.

It includes a checklist for recording symptoms, to help you start a discussion with your GP or treatment team.

If you're struggling to manage your menopausal symptoms, you may be able to get information and support from a specialist menopause clinic. Ask your treatment team or GP about this.

Pain

Lasting pain after breast surgery, lymph node removal or radiotherapy

You might have pain in your breast, chest, arm or armpit for months or even years after surgery or radiotherapy.

The pain is usually caused by bruising, stretching or damage to nerves during surgery or when scar tissue forms.

Tell your GP or treatment team about any ongoing pain, so they can assess it and help you manage it.

The following things can also help with pain.

Pain relief

Regularly taking pain relief like paracetamol or ibuprofen, either as a tablet or applied to the skin, may help.

Exercise and physiotherapy

Regular exercise has been shown to ease lots of types of pain.

Some people may need to be referred to a physiotherapist, who can help work out an exercise plan. They may suggest activities such as swimming, walking, yoga or Pilates.

Complementary therapies

Some studies show acupuncture may help reduce pain after breast cancer surgery.

Talking therapies and self-help techniques

Talking therapies, such as counselling and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), can help you find new ways to think about pain and the impact it has.

You might want to try some self-help techniques such as relaxation, meditation and distraction.

Wearing a well-fitting bra

Wearing a well-fitting bra may make a difference if you're in pain or discomfort.

Referral to a pain clinic

INFO

If your GP or hospital doctor cannot control your pain, you may benefit from going to a specialist pain clinic.

You can ask your GP to refer you.

Joint pain

Joint and muscle pain can be a side effect of some breast cancer treatments.

Joint and muscle pain is most commonly linked to hormone therapy, particularly aromatase inhibitors such as anastrozole, exemestane or letrozole.

It can also be a side effect of other treatments like some types of chemotherapy, targeted therapies, radiotherapy and bisphosphonates.

You can take simple pain relief, like paracetamol or ibuprofen, to help joint and muscle pain. Before using pain relief, ask your doctor or pharmacist about the correct dose, how long you should use it for and any possible side effects. This is especially important if you have any other medical conditions or take other medications.

Physical activity and self-help measures like using heat or ice packs, improving your posture and mindfulness can help with joint and muscle pain. We've got more information on managing joint pain on our website at **[breastcancernow.org](https://www.breastcancernow.org)**

If the pain does not improve, talk to your treatment team or GP. They may be able to refer you to a doctor who specialises in pain management.

If you're struggling to cope with pain and your treatment team or GP thinks it's a side effect of treatment, they may suggest a short break from your hormone treatment to see if your symptoms improve. They may also suggest switching to another type of treatment or another brand of the same treatment to see if that helps your symptoms.

It's important to speak to your treatment team before stopping any treatment.

Tracking your symptoms

INFO

Make a note of any symptoms, such as fatigue or pain, so you can speak to your GP or treatment team about them.

Bone health and osteoporosis

Some breast cancer treatments can increase your risk of osteoporosis, a condition where bones lose their strength and thickness (density).

The hormone oestrogen protects against bone loss and helps to keep bones strong.

Breast cancer treatments that affect the amount of oestrogen in the body include chemotherapy, hormone therapy and ovarian suppression (removing the ovaries or stopping them from working).

Although osteoporosis cannot be cured, treatments are available to try to keep the bones strong and less likely to break (fracture).

Osteoporosis information

INFO

The Royal Osteoporosis Society has information about preventing, treating and living with osteoporosis. Visit theros.org.uk

How can I look after my bones?

Lifestyle changes that can help you look after your bones include:

- Eating a healthy diet that includes plenty of calcium and vitamin D
- Limiting alcohol
- Being physically active
- Not smoking

Diet, calcium and vitamin D

A varied, balanced diet will give you the nutrients that are important for strong, healthy bones.

Calcium is a vital mineral for teeth and bones.

Our main source of calcium is dairy produce like milk, yoghurt and cheese.

If you don't eat or drink dairy, it's important to get enough calcium from other sources such as green leafy vegetables or oily fish.

Some dairy-free milks or meat alternatives like tofu are fortified with calcium.

Your body needs vitamin D to help it absorb calcium. You can get vitamin D from:

- Sunlight
- Food
- Supplements

From April to September, sunlight is strong enough for our bodies to make vitamin D. But the NHS recommends all adults in the UK take a vitamin D supplement during autumn and winter.

Limit alcohol

Drinking too much alcohol can affect your bone strength and density. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommends limiting alcohol to below 5 units a week after a breast cancer diagnosis.

Keep active

Regular weight-bearing exercises or activities are important for maintaining bone health. The Royal Osteoporosis Society has lots of information on what types of exercise are best for keeping bones strong and healthy. Visit theros.org.uk

Stop smoking

Smoking has been linked to increased bone loss and a higher risk of fractures, so it's important to stop or cut down if you smoke.

Speak to your GP if you need help to stop smoking.

Recurrence

Most breast cancers do not come back after treatment.

If breast cancer does come back, it's called recurrence.

See pages 23 to 25 for a guide to the signs and symptoms to look out for.

Worries about recurrence

Nearly everyone who has been treated for cancer worries about it coming back. At first, every ache or pain might make you anxious.

These worries are normal and you may find that fears about recurrence get better over time. But sometimes particular events can trigger worries, such as the days or weeks leading up to your follow-up appointments.

If you're finding it difficult to cope, speak to your treatment team or GP to see what support you might be able to access.

You can also talk to others on our online forum at **breastcancernow.org/forum**

You can find more tips on managing anxiety on our website or call our helpline to talk through your concerns with one of our nurses.

INFO

What is recurrence?

There are several different types of breast cancer recurrence.

Local recurrence

This is breast cancer that has come back in the chest or breast area, or in the skin near the original site or scars.

Locally advanced breast cancer

This is sometimes called regional recurrence. It's breast cancer that has come back and spread to the chest wall or skin of the breast, or the lymph nodes around the chest, neck and under the arm or breastbone. It has not spread to other areas of the body.

It may be called stage 3 breast cancer.

Metastatic (secondary) breast cancer

This is cancer that has spread from the breast to other parts of the body such as the bones, lungs, liver or brain. It may also be called advanced or stage 4 breast cancer.

What are the chances of breast cancer returning?

Most people diagnosed with primary breast cancer will not have a recurrence.

Each person's risk of breast cancer recurrence is different.

It depends on many things, such as the size, type, grade and features of the cancer and whether the lymph nodes were affected.

Your treatment team can tell you more about your individual risk of recurrence if you want to know this.

Depending on the features of your cancer, you might have tests called genomic assays to find out more about your risk of recurrence. See **breastcancernow.org** for more information.

Can I reduce my risk of recurrence?

INFO

Research suggests regular exercise, maintaining a healthy weight and keeping your alcohol intake within current guidelines may help reduce your risk of recurrence.

Signs to be aware of

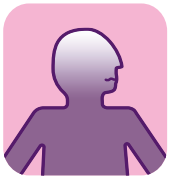
Tell your breast care nurse or GP if you have any **symptoms that are new or unusual for you, don't have any obvious cause and don't go away.**

Changes to the breast or chest area

Whether you've had breast-conserving surgery or a mastectomy, with or without reconstruction, it's important to be aware of any changes to either side, such as:

- Swelling on your chest, in your armpit or around your collarbone
- A change in shape or size
- A change in skin texture, such as puckering or dimpling
- The nipple has become inverted (pulled in) or looks different, for example changed its position or shape
- Liquid (discharge) that comes from the nipple without squeezing it
- Swelling in the arm or hand
- Redness or a rash on the skin, in or around the nipple or in the area of the scar line of your treated breast
- A lump or thickening that feels different (with your treated breast this could be on or away from the scar line)

Possible signs of metastatic (secondary) breast cancer



Feeling sick most of the time



A dry cough or feeling of breathlessness



Discomfort or swelling under the ribs or across the upper abdomen



Feeling much more tired than usual



Unexpected weight loss and a loss of appetite



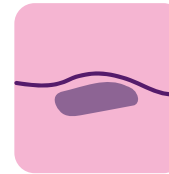
Feeling bloated or feeling full quickly when eating



Constipation



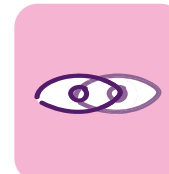
Severe or ongoing headaches



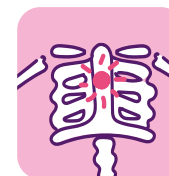
Any lumps or swellings under your arm, breastbone or collarbone



Loss of balance or any weakness or numbness of the limbs



Altered vision or speech



Bone pain, for example in your back, hips or ribs, that doesn't get better with pain relief and may be worse at night

INFO

Follow-up after treatment

Once hospital treatment for breast cancer ends, you'll usually be offered regular mammograms depending on the type of surgery you've had.

You may or may not have regular appointments with your treatment team.

For more information on the different types of follow-up after treatment, see our booklet

After breast cancer treatment: what now?

Coping emotionally

A breast cancer diagnosis can bring up lots of different emotions, including sadness and low mood, shock, anger and feeling numb.

You may still feel some or all of these after treatment has ended.

Anxiety and stress

After a diagnosis of breast cancer, you may feel more stressed or anxious than usual.

You may have anxiety for the first time. If you have had anxiety in the past, your anxiety may feel different or worse than before.

There are techniques and support to help you reduce stress and cope with anxiety.

Things you can try yourself

Self-help techniques include:

- Distraction – focusing on things around you, or a hobby or interest, to help shut out negative thoughts
- Planning – if you can, break down larger tasks into smaller tasks, achievable over several days, or make a list of priorities
- Relaxation, visualisation, mindfulness and meditation – some people find these techniques helpful to reduce stress and tension
- Exercise and eating healthily – regular physical activity, eating well and limiting your alcohol intake can make a difference to your mood

- Complementary therapies – some people find complementary therapies like acupuncture and aromatherapy, and activities such as yoga, tai chi and Qigong, can reduce stress and anxiety and improves their mood. There's more information about these on our website

Talking therapies

There are different types of talking therapies. Your treatment team or GP may be able to refer you.

One-to-one counselling

Counselling allows you to explore feelings such as anger, anxiety and grief, which can be related to your cancer diagnosis, making them easier to understand and cope with.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)

CBT can help you to change patterns of thinking and behaviour that may be stopping you from moving forward.

INFO

Talking to other people

If you're finding it difficult to cope emotionally, you might want to talk to someone about how you're feeling.

You may find it helpful to:

- Call our helpline (**0808 800 6000**) to speak to one of our breast care nurses
- Ask our nurses a question using the Ask Our Nurses email service or the Ask Our Nurses section of our online forum
- Speak to a trained volunteer who's been through similar experiences to you through our Someone Like Me service
- Speak to your own breast care nurse and ask what support is available in your area

To find out more about our services, visit **breastcancernow.org/all-services**

Low mood and depression

Lots of people experience low mood after treatment for breast cancer.

Low mood usually improves over time, but if it doesn't then you could have depression.

When to ask for support

If you or the people close to you are worried you might be depressed, talk to your treatment team or GP.

Depression affects people in different ways and can cause a variety of symptoms, including:

- Persistent low mood or sadness
- Feeling hopeless or helpless
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Persistent thoughts like “I can’t be bothered” or “What’s the point?”
- Feeling tearful, irritable or guilty
- Loss of motivation and interest in things you used to enjoy
- Difficulty sleeping or sleeping more than usual
- Changes in your appetite, like eating more or less than usual
- Loss of interest in your appearance
- Feeling very low or having suicidal thoughts

Your treatment team or GP can refer you to a counsellor, psychiatrist or psychologist for help and support.

Treatment for depression

Talking therapies

Professional support such as counselling or CBT (see page 30) can help. Your treatment team or GP can tell you about services in your area.

Antidepressants

Your GP may recommend antidepressant drugs to treat symptoms of depression.

It usually takes 1 to 2 weeks before you start to feel an improvement in mood, and around 8 weeks to feel the full benefits.

You'll usually be recommended to take antidepressants for at least 6 months. But your GP will talk to you about how long to take them for.

Useful organisations

Some organisations that provide information or support that might help include:

- Anxiety UK ([anxietyuk.org.uk](https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk))
- Mental Health Foundation ([mentalhealth.org.uk](https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk))
- Mind ([mind.org.uk](https://www.mind.org.uk))
- NHS website ([nhs.uk/mental-health](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health))
- Scottish Action for Mental Health ([samh.org.uk](https://www.samh.org.uk))
- Samaritans ([samaritans.org](https://www.samaritans.org) or call 116 123)

INFO

Feeling isolated

After treatment, you may find it difficult to relate to other people and for them to relate to you.

People around you might expect you to be back to normal once treatment has finished. They might not understand if you're not doing as well as they expect.

You might feel the need to avoid situations where you have to deal with others' responses to you.

Sharing your feelings

Speaking to your treatment team or a counsellor about how you're feeling can help you get the support you need. You may find it useful to ask the people close to you to read this booklet to help them understand the issues you may be facing. This may help you talk to them about how you're feeling.

Talking to someone else who has been through similar experiences may also help you feel less isolated (see page 50).

Feelings about your body after treatment

Breast cancer and its treatments can cause changes to your body and the way you look.

Getting used to how your body looks after treatment can take time.

The organisation Flat Friends (flatfriends.org.uk) has resources and support for anyone who's had a mastectomy without breast reconstruction.

Keeping Abreast (keepingabreast.org.uk) offers support and information to women who've had or are thinking about reconstruction.

You might find it useful to read our booklets

Breast reconstruction and **Breast prostheses, bras and clothes after surgery** to help you consider the different options available.

How you feel about your body may affect how you relate to the people around you, such as a partner.

Our booklet **Your body, intimacy and sex** explores how changes to your body can affect your confidence, and how they may affect sex and intimacy.

If you continue to find looking at your body difficult or upsetting, it may help to speak to your GP or treatment team.

They can refer you to a counsellor if they feel this will be helpful.

Our Someone Like Me service can put you in touch, by phone or email, with someone who's had a similar experience to you. Find out more at **breastcancernow.org/all-services**

Diet, exercise and physical wellbeing

Many people want to know what they can do to look after their health following treatment.

This section looks at diet and exercise after treatment and has tips if you're finding it hard to sleep well.

We also look at complementary therapies, which you might find useful after treatment.

Diet after breast cancer treatment

After treatment for breast cancer, you may have gained or lost weight, or you may want to know if diet can play a role in your recovery and future health.

It can be helpful to speak with your breast care nurse, GP or practice nurse. They'll discuss your current diet and lifestyle with you and can help you put a plan together if you want or need to make any changes.

For more information, see our booklet **Diet and breast cancer**.

If you're concerned about your weight

Your GP or practice nurse can assess if your current weight is healthy and may refer you to a dietitian if needed. They can also let you know about any local services to help you manage your weight.

Some treatments can affect bone health

So make sure you get enough calcium from your diet. Good sources include milk and dairy products, green leafy vegetables and dried fruit such as apricots and figs.

There's conflicting evidence about whether some herbal products are safe or effective

So always talk to your treatment team, GP, pharmacist or a dietitian before taking them. You can find information about herbal medicine on the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center website (mskcc.org).

Can diet affect the risk of breast cancer coming back?

There's some evidence that a higher fibre intake may reduce the risk of breast cancer recurrence, but more research is needed to find out more. Fibre has many health benefits, and high-fibre foods tend to be lower in calories and can help you feel full for longer.

There's some evidence that a lower saturated fat intake may reduce the risk of recurrence, but again more research is needed to find out more. It's a good idea to limit the amount of fat you eat, particularly saturated fat, because it increases the risk of conditions such as heart disease.

Maintaining a healthy weight, as well as limiting alcohol and being physically active, can help reduce the risk of recurrence.

Some people consider following a specific "cancer diet", such as:

- Dairy-free diets
- The Bristol Whole Life approach to healthy eating
- Macrobiotic diets

There's no conclusive evidence that these special diets reduce the risk of breast cancer recurrence.

Exercise after treatment

Why be physically active?

Regular physical activity has many benefits.

There's evidence that being active and maintaining a healthy weight after treatment can reduce the risk of breast cancer coming back. It can also help to reduce some side effects of cancer treatment.

How much activity should I do?

It's recommended that everyone should do moderate exercise or physical activity for 30 minutes, 5 times a week.

Moderate activities include brisk walking, riding a bike or water aerobics.

However, this may feel overwhelming, especially if you're having or have just finished treatment. If this is the case, breaking up the 30 minutes into three 10-minute sessions can still provide benefits.

Getting started and staying motivated

Before you start any exercise, discuss it with your treatment team or GP, then begin gently and build up gradually.

If you've had breast reconstruction, check with your treatment team when you can start exercising and which exercises are safe.

- Start with short walks, gentle stretching or deep breathing exercises
- Ask someone to exercise with you and do it together
- Use a walking app or pedometer to monitor your daily step count
- Set realistic and achievable goals, short-term ones to begin with

- Work out what barriers you might have before beginning an exercise programme, such as family or work commitments
- Choose something you enjoy and that works with your lifestyle
- Select a time in the day when your energy levels are higher
- Track your progress, for example in a diary or a note on your phone

Sleep

Difficulty sleeping can have a number of causes, from menopausal symptoms to stress and anxiety.

Tips that might help you sleep

- Exercise – regular moderate exercise during the day can help, but try to avoid exercise late in the evening
- Avoid caffeine after mid-afternoon – caffeine-containing drinks include tea, coffee and many fizzy drinks
- Limit alcohol – alcohol can cause disrupted sleep, even if it helps you fall asleep initially
- Limit daytime naps – keep them to less than half an hour at a time and avoid late afternoon naps
- Keep to a routine – try to go to bed and get up at the same time each day
- Relax before bedtime – listen to some quiet music or an audiobook, have a warm bath or practise a relaxation technique
- Avoid screens before bed – this includes watching TV or using your mobile phone
- Create the right conditions for sleep – make sure your bedroom is quiet, dark and a comfortable temperature

- If you cannot get to sleep – get up for a bit rather than lying in bed. Read or listen to the radio until you start to feel tired, then go back to bed again

Complementary therapies

Complementary therapies are used alongside conventional breast cancer treatments.

Complementary therapies include:

- Acupuncture
- Acupressure and shiatsu
- Aromatherapy
- Healing and energy therapies
- Hypnotherapy
- Massage
- Reflexology

Are they safe?

Most complementary therapies are safe for people with breast cancer. However, if you're considering complementary therapies, speak to your treatment team first.

Your treatment team may advise you to avoid certain complementary therapies if there's a chance they may interact with your breast cancer treatment.

Where to find a complementary therapist

Some hospitals, cancer support centres and charities provide complementary therapies. This may be at a subsidised cost.

Your breast care nurse or treatment team may be able to tell you more about this or give you a list of therapists in your area.

You may want to ask the therapist if they've worked with people diagnosed with breast cancer.

If you see a therapist, tell them about your breast cancer and treatment.

Relationships, intimacy and sex

The end of treatment can be a difficult time. Your family and friends may expect things to go back to how they were before your diagnosis, but you may feel differently.

If you have a partner, they may also need time to adjust after your diagnosis and treatment.

Your relationships

Family and friends

You might feel able to rely on your friends or family for support after treatment ends. Or you might find that your relationships with people change after a diagnosis.

Friends may withdraw because they feel awkward or do not know what to say, which can feel hurtful. You might feel like you do not have as much in common with your friends anymore or like you're no longer in the same life stage.

Friends or family members may have little experience of cancer and what it means, and some people may react in a way that makes you feel unsupported.

Talking openly about how you feel may make it easier for the people around you to respond to your needs.

Or you may choose not to talk about your breast cancer experience with those outside your immediate family or treatment team.

If you have children

After your treatment has finished, your children may expect you to go back to your “normal” self.

Make sure they have realistic expectations about your energy levels, how involved you can be and where you may still need their help or understanding.

Continue talking with your children about your experience of breast cancer even after treatment has finished. Children tend to be more comfortable when they know what’s happening and what to expect.

You may want to talk with them about any fears they may have for you, your partner (if you have one) or their own future.

If you have a partner

A breast cancer diagnosis can affect relationships in different ways.

Some couples become closer and their relationship gets stronger. However, a relationship can become strained.

Your partner may have become more independent or taken on the role of carer during your treatment. Once treatment has finished your partner may have adjusted to their new role and want to continue this way. Or they may want to go back to how things were before.

Counselling can be very helpful, and discussing your feelings with someone impartial can help you both to see things more clearly. Organisations like Relate offer relationship counselling. Or your treatment team or GP may be able to refer you to counselling services in your area.

Our booklet **When your partner has breast cancer** has more information for your partner, including support they can access.

Changes in your relationship

After a cancer diagnosis, you or your partner's perspective may change.

You both might focus on new priorities and re-evaluate what's important.

This may lead to the relationship coming to its natural end.

Being able to talk openly about your situation can mean you're able to find solutions together. This may be a gradual process, but avoiding problems altogether may make them more difficult to resolve in the long run.

Dealing with something like cancer can change a relationship. This may be particularly difficult if the relationship is new. If you're in the early stages of a relationship, you may find you're discussing important issues much sooner than you would have liked.

Sex and intimacy after treatment

How breast cancer affects you sexually will be unique to you.

Changes to your body may affect your confidence and feelings about yourself.

You might be anxious about your first sexual experience after your diagnosis, or worried things will not be the same as before.

These worries are normal. It can take time for your confidence to return and for you to feel comfortable being intimate with a partner or having sex again.

Tips for getting back to sex

- Start afresh – try not to compare things now to how they were before you were diagnosed with breast cancer
- Explore your body, alone or with a partner – this can help you discover what kind of touch is still pleasant or where it's painful. Sensual and genital touching can help remove anxiety associated with sex and be a helpful starting point for resuming sexual activity
- Use lubricants or moisturisers – using a vaginal lubricant or a vaginal moisturiser regularly can ease dryness and help prevent pain
- Pelvic floor exercises – doing pelvic floor exercises increases blood flow to the vaginal area, and can heighten sexual feelings and help relax these muscles
- Don't rush – take things slowly. Think about what kind and level of intimacy you feel comfortable with, and how much energy you have
- Create a relaxed atmosphere – lighting, music or aromatherapy oils can help create a comfortable and sensual atmosphere
- Wear what makes you comfortable – you may feel uncomfortable naked and choose to wear nightwear. Or you might choose to wear a prosthesis and bra to bed. Do whatever makes you feel more comfortable and relaxed

Starting a new relationship

You may find the thought of forming a new relationship daunting.

Meeting someone new may mean telling them about your breast cancer. Deciding when and how to do this can be difficult.

It might feel hard to find the right time and words to do this. But as you get to know someone and feel more comfortable with them, you may find it easier to talk about all aspects of your life, including your breast cancer.

It's important to move at a pace that you're comfortable with.

Work and finances

Breast cancer can cause financial and practical issues during and after treatment.

You may have concerns about money, or you may be thinking about going back to work.

Your rights at work

Your rights as an employee are protected by the Equality Act 2010, or the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 in Northern Ireland. The Acts protect people from being discriminated against at work and during the recruitment process because of their diagnosis and ongoing treatment.

Under the Equality Act, anyone who has or has had cancer is classed as disabled. Your employer has to make reasonable adjustments to help you return to work, have time off for medical appointments and continue treatment and recovery.

Returning to work

Returning to work might help you start getting back to the things you did before your diagnosis.

However, you may feel upset and frustrated if returning to work is not as straightforward as you'd imagined.

You may have ongoing side effects from treatment such as fatigue and difficulty concentrating (cognitive impairment or "chemo brain"). Or you may still be adjusting to life after cancer treatment and the emotional changes this can bring.

It's common to feel less confident at work, particularly if you've been off for a while.

Planning your return

It can be helpful to discuss your plan to return to work with your treatment team or GP. You can also speak to your HR department if you have one or your manager.

Your employer is required to make reasonable adjustments to help you return to work and manage work long term. For example, a phased return to work can help you gradually adjust to your normal working pattern.

There may be other adjustments that could benefit you. You can ask your treatment team what they'd recommend and share this with your employer. And there's more information about work and breast cancer on our website at **breastcancernow.org**

If you're self-employed

If you're self-employed, you'll have had to make decisions about how you run your business during treatment and returning to work might be difficult. If you can, try to build up your working hours gradually and prioritise the most important tasks.

Financial help and benefits

You may be able to claim benefits or get other financial support.

For example, if you're employed and have to take time off sick, you'll probably be entitled to Statutory Sick Pay (SSP).

You may also be entitled to benefits that help with the cost of living, housing, childcare and transport, depending on your circumstances and your income.

Where to find information about benefits and financial support

The benefits system can be confusing to navigate but there's support available to help you.

You can find information about finances and benefits on our website **breastcancernow.org**

You can use an online benefits calculator to get an estimate of what benefits you could get. Visit gov.uk/benefits-calculators

Welfare advisers

Some hospitals have welfare advisers who can give you guidance on benefits.

Talk to someone in your treatment team or your GP who can refer you.

Macmillan Cancer Support

Macmillan Cancer Support produces useful information about benefits and finances, which you can find on their website at macmillan.org.uk

Citizens Advice

Citizens Advice can tell you what local government assistance and benefits may be available to you, your family and carers. They can also help you fill out benefit claim forms.

Age UK

Age UK can offer advice on a wide range of benefits. Visit their website at ageuk.org.uk or call 0800 169 2081.

Getting support

Expert information on everything from symptoms to chemotherapy. Help so you can live well. Meeting people who are going through the same thing – people who just get it.

We're here with life-changing support now. Whatever you're going through. However you need it. So you never have to face breast cancer alone.

Find out more about all our support services on our website at **breastcancernow.org/all-services**

Moving Forward

We know it's not "back to normal" after breast cancer treatment.

The lingering side effects. The fear of it coming back. Those nagging worries that keep you up at night. Everyone expecting you to be the same as you were. To move on.

We get it. And we're here to help. At our Moving Forward courses, you'll meet other people who've been through it, who understand. And you'll get the tools to help you feel in control. So you can move forward with your life.

Helpline

Worried and confused about breast cancer or breast health? Need answers you can trust? Whatever's on your mind, our helpline is here. It's staffed by our expert nurses and trained staff. And it's completely free and confidential. So you can get the information and support you need, whatever you're going through.

Ask Our Nurses

Need an answer? Whatever's on your mind, our breast care nurses can help. Just send your question by email, Facebook, Instagram or our forum. You'll get a clear, tailored reply with information you can trust.

Forum

Worries about breast cancer keeping you up at night? Want to connect with people who just get it? Just need some reassurance? Our online forum is here. Whatever the time. So you can connect with thousands of other people who understand.

Someone Like Me

There's nothing quite like finding someone who really gets it. Who knows how it feels. Who can relate. With Someone Like Me, we'll match you with a trained volunteer who understands. Someone who's been through a similar diagnosis or treatment to you. They'll be there to offer support, answer questions or just listen. Over the phone or by email. Because you don't have to go through breast cancer alone.

Other useful organisations

Menopausal symptoms

- **Menopause and Cancer**

Support for anyone affected by menopause after cancer:
menopauseandcancer.org

- **Menopause Matters**

Information, podcasts and a magazine about menopause:
menopausematters.co.uk

Hair loss

- **Cancer Hair Care**

Support for anyone with hair loss due to cancer:
cancerhaircare.co.uk

- **My New Hair**

Support for anyone with medial hair loss and a stylist directory for salons with special training in wig styling and hair regrowth: mynewhair.org

Lymphoedema

- **The Lymphoedema Support Network**

Information, a helpline and local support groups for anyone living with lymphoedema: lymphoedema.org

Osteoporosis

- **Royal Osteoporosis Society**

Information and support for bone health and osteoporosis:
theros.org.uk

Relationships and sex

- **College of Sexual and Relationship Therapists (COSRT)**

Directory of registered sex and relationship therapists:
cosrt.org.uk

- **Relate**

Support and counselling to improve relationships, including for couples and families: relate.org.uk

Mental health and wellbeing

- **Anxiety UK**

Information and support, including support to find talking therapies, for people living with anxiety: anxietyuk.org.uk

- **Maggie's Centres**

Information and support for people affected by cancer and their loved ones, including mental health support, groups and courses: maggies.org

- **Mental Health Foundation**

Information for anyone living with a mental health condition: mentalhealth.org.uk

- **Mind**

Information and support, including a helpline, peer support and local groups, for anyone living with a mental health condition: mind.org.uk

Work

- **Acas (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service)**
Free, impartial advice on workplace rights, rules and best practice: [acas.org.uk](https://www.acas.org.uk)
- **Access to Work**
Government support to help you get or stay in work if you have a disability: [gov.uk/access-to-work](https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work)
- **Macmillan Cancer Support**
Advice and support for anyone living with or beyond cancer, including information on work, self-employment and rights: [macmillan.org.uk](https://www.macmillan.org.uk)
- **Working Families**
Information and support, including a helpline, for working parents and carers: [workingfamilies.org.uk](https://www.workingfamilies.org.uk)
- **Working With Cancer**
Career coaching and advice for anyone affected by cancer, and their partners: [workingwithcancer.co.uk](https://www.workingwithcancer.co.uk)

Finances and benefits

- **Age UK**
Support, including about benefits and finances, for older people: [ageuk.org.uk](https://www.ageuk.org.uk)
- **Citizens Advice**
Information and support to help people understand benefits, work, money and more: [citizensadvice.org.uk](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)



We're the UK's leading breast cancer charity. And we're combining the power of science and support to change breast cancer.

Life-saving science

Uncovering how breast cancer develops and spreads. New and better treatments that can find and destroy cancer cells. And one day, cures that can stop it in its tracks entirely.

Life-changing support

Expert information on everything from signs and symptoms to chemotherapy. Help so you can live well. Meeting people who are going through the same thing – people who just get it.

Change-making campaigns

Making sure everyone knows the importance of checking their breasts and chests, and the signs to look out for. Pushing for better diagnosis and care. Making sure everyone can get the drugs they need.

We don't get any government or NHS funding for our information or support. We rely on our supporters to make change happen.

So if you've found this information helpful and you'd like to support us, go to: **breastcancernow.org/give**

About this information

Moving Forward: After breast cancer was written by Breast Cancer Now's clinical specialists, and reviewed by healthcare professionals and people affected by breast cancer.



For a full list of the sources we used to research it:
Email **health-info@breastcancernow.org**



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breastcancernow.org/publications



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Email **health-info@breastcancernow.org**

Medical disclaimer

We make every effort to ensure that our health information is accurate and up to date, but it doesn't replace the information and support from professionals in your healthcare team. So far as is permitted by law, Breast Cancer Now doesn't accept liability in relation to the use of any information contained in this publication, or third-party information included or referred to in it.

**BREAST
CANCER
NOW**

Whatever breast cancer brings, we're here.

Information on everything from symptoms to treatment and beyond. Support to help you live well. Meet people going through the same thing – people who just get it.

We're here with life-changing information and support now. Whatever you're going through. However you need it.

Call **0808 800 6000** to talk to one of our nurses.

Visit **breastcancernow.org** now for breast cancer information you can trust.

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