Life after breast cancer
I’m not the same...
but I’m happy
Our donation bags are small, but our ambition is big. Re-Fashion believes charities should earn more from donated clothes. That’s why we sell online. It means we can reach lots of customers, any time of the day, and make more from your donation when it sells*. That makes a big difference to charity. So order a donation bag now.

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*Charities receive up to 60% of each item sold. On the lowest value items sold, a minimum of 75 pence goes to the charity.
Breast Cancer Care’s Helpline gets lots of calls from people who say they feel lonely after their treatment has finished. It’s a very common issue. Some people feel lonely because they live alone and don’t have anyone to speak to. But even people who are surrounded by family and friends can experience loneliness.

There are practical things you can do if you’re feeling lonely. Turn to page 14 to find out why you might feel lonely after a breast cancer diagnosis, and what you can do to combat it.

One thing that can help is going on a course to get practical information and support. Breast Cancer Care’s Moving Forward courses help people adjust to life after treatment. Our cover star Lurline went on a Moving Forward course as she was approaching the end of her hospital treatment. For Lurline, the support and companionship she found through Moving Forward was ‘wonderful’. Turn to page 6 to read her story.

At Vita, we’re always promoting the benefits of physical activity after a breast cancer diagnosis, and yoga and pilates are popular up and down the country. But the world of yoga and pilates can seem somewhat baffling to the uninitiated. On page 10, we explain the difference between the two activities and look at how to get started if you fancy trying one out.

Gareth Fletcher
Editor
vita@breastcancercare.org.uk
Inbox

Your letters and emails

Dear Vita

I was diagnosed in August 2016 and remember how devastating it was, not only for me but also for my husband and two lovely daughters.

Initially, I decided not to tell my parents and in-laws. I had a mastectomy and thought: it’s done! No one will know…

But two weeks post-mastectomy, pathology results showed lymph nodes affected. I required six months of chemo, 15 days of radiotherapy and hormone tablets for 10 years.

I thought: I can’t get away with not telling my parents as I will be losing my hair. It was one of the most difficult times, breaking the news via FaceTime (they are almost 7,000 miles away), unable to hug them.

I was fortunate to have great family and friends to get me through. Finding humour during and after treatment was also a big factor such as letting my pet Molly wear my wig.

Attending courses like Moving Forward and Younger Women Together was a lifeline and having Vita magazine at hand was very inspiring.

Vanjee

Dear Vita

Me and my sister were both tested for the altered BRAC2 gene back in January 2014, because of a strong family history of cancer.

Exactly three years later, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Six months later, my sister also received the devastating news that she had breast cancer. We were very close but sharing this journey together has made us even closer. I love my sister with all my heart, my best friend.

Helen

Dear Vita

A year and a half ago I was diagnosed with bilateral breast cancer. All through my treatment journey I found the information I received from Breast Cancer Care extremely helpful. I am totally blind. It was so refreshing to be able to get the information I needed in Braille, thus saving my long-suffering husband the task of reading everything to me. This includes Vita magazine, which I always enjoy.

Eve

What’s on your mind?
Email vita@breastcancercare.org.uk
Write Vita magazine, Breast Cancer Care, Chester House, 1–3 Brixton Road, London SW9 6DE
Care After Breast Cancer
We know that treatment for breast cancer can have a life-changing effect on people’s physical and emotional wellbeing.

Breast Cancer Care offers much-needed support to women when hospital treatment comes to an end, a time that many people find difficult. But currently, 41% of women don’t have the professional support they need to deal with the long-term effects of a breast cancer diagnosis and treatment.

That’s why Breast Cancer Care is campaigning for Care After Breast Cancer. To find out how you can help campaign for better care after treatment, and to find out more about Breast Cancer Care’s services such as Moving Forward, visit breastcancercare.org.uk/CareAfter

Award-winning information pack updated
Breast Cancer Care has updated its Secondary breast cancer information pack.

Suitable for anyone whose breast cancer has spread to another part of their body, the pack contains clear and helpful information on dealing with a diagnosis, having treatment and monitoring your condition. It also has plenty of tips for making sure your needs and concerns are met, and a new personal organiser to record symptoms and side effects, as well as details of appointments.

To order a copy, visit breastcancercare.org.uk/publications or call 0808 800 6000

Dates for the diary
It might be a little way off yet, but we’re already looking forward to the activities of Breast Cancer Awareness Month this October.

We kick off in style with Breast Cancer Care’s fabulous London fashion show, featuring models who’ve all had a breast cancer diagnosis. After that, people all over the country will be having fun and raising money together through The Big Pink.

To find out more about The Show and The Big Pink and how to get involved, turn to page 25.
Lurline wasn’t worried when a letter arrived two weeks after her routine breast screening appointment, asking her to go for further assessment at the local hospital. ‘Because of the way the letter was worded, I wasn’t alarmed,’ says Lurline, who was 52 at the time. ‘I went along, and the waiting room was quite a solemn place. The people around me were anxious. It was only then I sensed something could be wrong.’

A biopsy followed the mammogram, and a nurse explained the possible scenarios. ‘When I left hospital, I kind of knew,’ she says. ‘When I got the results a week later, I was prepared for the news. There were tears, obviously. But I was OK. ‘Overall I’ve been pretty positive from the start.’

**A lot to take in**

Lurline was diagnosed with breast cancer on 17 March 2016, a date she says she will always remember. ‘There was a lot to take in, and when I got home I started to read a lot more.’ Lurline’s dental background helped her understand the medical information. She also relied on her faith from the start. ‘I’m a woman of faith and believe in God,’ she says. ‘I thought: if this is my lot then I put myself in your hands. ‘I didn’t think I’d definitely be cured and it would all be taken away. But I said: “Wherever this journey takes me, I accept it”.’

**Traumatic**

Initially, Lurline was scheduled to have a lumpectomy, then radiotherapy. But the treatment plan changed after surgery, and chemotherapy was recommended. ‘That news was devastating,’ she says. ‘To be honest, I was just not wanting to lose my hair.’ Lurline initially used a cold cap to try to prevent hair loss during chemotherapy. But between the second and third cycle, her fear became a reality. ‘It was my birthday and my daughters had arranged lunch. I washed my hair and it felt like I had rocks on my head. My hair was all clumped. I was hysterical – distraught and crying. ‘I asked my husband to cut it – it was coming off anyway. That’s how I spent my birthday!’

Losing her hair was traumatic, and it took time to get used to it. ‘It has grown back, but I’ve now decided to keep it short. I’ve been told it suits me.’

**Grateful**

Lurline says support from family, friends and healthcare professionals helped her remain positive through treatment. ‘I went to a lovely hospital. I got to know the nurses, and we had a laugh. ‘My immediate family were there with me. And a fantastic friend came and sat with me through one of my chemo cycles.’
‘I did have some terrible days; I wasn’t Superwoman all the way through. But I was very grateful for the expertise of the doctors.”

Moving Forward
Lurline was happy when treatment came to an end, but missed the regularity of hospital appointments. As she was approaching the end of treatment, she signed up to a Breast Cancer Care Moving Forward course. The free courses provide information, support and professional guidance on adjusting to life after breast cancer treatment.

‘It was wonderful,’ she says. ‘It was a small group. The coordinator was lovely and made us all feel so welcome.

‘It covered topics I was interested in, like lymphoedema, which I was still adjusting to. Also diet, exercise and a bit about aromatherapy. It was very interactive.

‘When it finished, I did some online aromatherapy courses, so it’s given me a new hobby. ‘Just the companionship and talking to others was wonderful; to hear their stories and be supported by them.”

Empowered
Life for Lurline has changed dramatically since her diagnosis.

‘I’m a dental hygienist, but because of lymphoedema and other ongoing side effects, I’m in the process of retiring,’ she says. ‘My manual dexterity has been compromised.

‘I went through a very difficult time as I love my career and have been doing it for 30 years.’

Despite the difficulties, Lurline says she’s now in a positive place and is embracing new opportunities.

‘I ended up going to Parliament to do a speech about Moving Forward. I would never have had the opportunity otherwise.’

Lurline will also make her debut as a model in Breast Cancer Care’s London fashion show in the autumn. ‘It’s something I never would have contemplated doing before. But because my perspective has changed I can embrace this.’

Breast cancer has changed her outlook in general, she says. ‘I don’t worry about things like I used to. I really value time spent with friends and family, and supporting others whenever possible.

‘Yes I have issues, but I don’t dwell on them. I’m not the same as before my diagnosis. But my faith is stronger and I am happy.’

To find out more about Moving Forward courses, which can help you adjust to life after treatment, visit breastcancercare.org.uk/moving-forward or call 0345 077 1893.
Breast prostheses
the essentials

With the help of an expert, we explore breast prosthesis options and new developments, as well as how to care for and when to replace your prosthesis.

Multiple choice
Breast prostheses – artificial breast forms – come in an array of shapes, styles, sizes and skin tones. They can be full or partial, symmetrical or asymmetrical, and various weights.

‘There’s a vast range of prostheses,’ says Marita Louis, managing director of Woman Zone (woman-zone.co.uk), who has over 30 years’ experience of prosthesis fitting. ‘Women should be able to choose the right type for them.

‘A well-fitting bra is essential, and this bra will dictate the shape. Touch and feel comes into it too. It’s a very individual choice.’

Breast Cancer Care’s recently updated booklet Breast prostheses, bras and clothes after surgery has lots of information on the different options available.

The fitting
Most women are fitted for a prosthesis at their local hospital, and there’s usually a good choice of options available on the NHS.

A temporary prosthesis, or ‘softie’, is worn while recovering from surgery. A permanent prosthesis can be fitted once the area is fully healed, usually within six to eight weeks.

Some companies who make prostheses also offer a fitting service. You can find a list of prosthesis and post-surgery bra and swimwear suppliers at breastcancercare.org.uk/suppliers-bras-clothes

Made to measure
Woman Zone is currently the only company offering a fully custom-made option in the UK.

The process involves taking pictures and using a 3D scanner to help create a prosthesis that exactly matches the chest wall. ‘The skin colour and nipple are also matched,’ says Marita, ‘and it will suit women of any size. It’s suitable after any type of surgery.’

The service will currently set you back around £3,000 including an initial consultation, though certain insurance companies will cover the cost.

‘The first time I fitted one it was so emotional,’ says Marita. ‘I could tell it was going to be life-changing. Some consultants have likened it to an external reconstruction.’

How to care for a prosthesis
The best way to care for a permanent prosthesis is to treat it as you would your own skin.

‘Wash it with warm soapy water and towel dry every day,’ says Marita. ‘Then you can either wear it or store it in the manufacturer’s box to keep it safe.’

With a temporary prosthesis or ‘softie’, usually worn after surgery while the area is healing, Marita recommends hand washing it like you would a bra.

A prosthesis can be damaged by sharp objects, which can cause silicone inside to leak out. ‘If you do damage one, put a plaster on it or wrap it in cling film until you can get back to the hospital,’ says Marita.
Time to replace

Every prosthesis has a guarantee, though most will last longer than this period. You can get a replacement prosthesis on the NHS, and many women replace their prosthesis every two to three years.

Marita points out that it’s wise to be refitted when you go back, rather than simply asking for the same prosthesis again, as new and improved breast forms are being developed all the time.

You can also be fitted for a new prosthesis if the one you have is no longer a good fit, even if it’s still in good condition. This might be the case if your weight has changed, for example.

Fear of flying?

It’s safe to fly with a prosthesis. If you pack it in your checked-in luggage, small air bubbles may appear in the back of the prosthesis. These are harmless and will disappear shortly after landing.

You may be asked to have a body scan at the airport. Breast prostheses will show up on scanners. If selected, you might want to tell security staff that you’re wearing a prosthesis. Or you could carry a letter from your GP explaining this.

A body scan takes a few seconds. You won’t be identifiable from the scanned image, and images are deleted immediately after they’ve been assessed.

Making a splash

Swim prostheses are made especially for use when swimming. They aren’t damaged by salt water or chlorine.

In Wales you can get swim prostheses on the NHS; in most other areas of the UK you’ll have to pay for one.

Although you can swim in a silicone or foam leisure prosthesis, it’s important to rinse it well afterwards to avoid any possible damage from chlorine or salt water.

Donate a prosthesis

It’s possible to donate a good-quality prosthesis you no longer need so it can be sent to a country where it’s difficult or impossible to get a breast prosthesis.

Hospices of Hope sends unused or recycled breast prostheses in good condition to Eastern Europe. Visit hospicesofhope.co.uk or call 01959 525 110.

To order a copy of Breast Cancer Care’s recently updated booklet Breast prostheses, bras and clothes after surgery, go to breastcancercare.org.uk/publications or call the Helpline on 0808 800 6000.
When you think of yoga and pilates, you might picture super-bendy limbs, impossible postures and lycra-clad bodies. But these activities have something to offer people of all fitness levels and ages.

There’s some evidence that yoga may help to improve sleep quality and reduce fatigue – a common side effect of breast cancer treatment. And for people who practise pilates regularly, it promises core strength, flexibility and lean muscle tone.

Types of yoga

There are several different types of yoga, which can be baffling. If you’re new to yoga you might want to look for a beginners’ class that describes itself as hatha or iyengar yoga.

Hatha yoga is a general term that refers to any type of yoga that teaches physical postures. It generally means that you’ll get a gentle introduction to the most basic yoga postures. Nearly every type of yoga class taught in the West is hatha yoga. At the end of a class you probably won’t feel hot and sweaty, but you should feel looser and more relaxed.

Iyengar yoga is more precise and works on the correct alignment of the pose. To help with this it uses blocks, blankets, straps, chairs and bolsters. By using props it allows even the stiffest bodies to achieve the poses and can be really useful after an injury or getting movement back after surgery.

Types of pilates

Pilates exercises can be done on a mat or using special equipment such as the Reformer. The mat uses your own body weight to create resistance. The Reformer has a system of pulleys, springs, handles and straps, which provide either resistance or support, depending on your needs.

It can be confusing trying to work out which form of pilates is right for you, especially if you’re a beginner. Many pilates experts recommend mat classes as the best place to start for beginners.

Yoga or pilates: what’s the difference?

Yoga originated thousands of years ago in India. It combines physical poses with breathing techniques and relaxation.

Pilates – named after Joseph Pilates, its German-born inventor – began in the early 20th century. It aims to improve strength and flexibility, with a particular focus on core strength.

The difference between the two is essentially that yoga uses static poses with an emphasis on relaxation and meditation, while pilates exercises are performed in a flow of movement.
Choosing a class: what to look for

A sensible place to start when looking for a class is to talk to friends. A recommendation often helps you to judge the level and type of class. Sometimes you may need to try more than one class, or type of class, to find a teacher you trust and a class you enjoy.

If you’re looking for a local yoga class, you may want to look at the British Wheel of Yoga website (bwy.org.uk). For a pilates class, Pilates Near You (pilatesnearyou.co.uk) features a range of local classes that use either a mat or equipment.

It can be helpful to go along with a friend who has already tried the class, or you could encourage someone to try it out with you.

Contacting the teacher before you go to chat through what you want to get from the class is also important, so that they’re aware of your needs. It can also be useful to find out if you need to bring a mat with you.

What to wear

T-shirts, capris and leggings are all great options.

If you’re practising a more physical form of yoga, clothing that sits close to the skin and wicks away sweat is practical. For slower classes, or when you’re just beginning, consider wearing an extra layer for warmth, or looser, comfortable types of clothing with a longline vest top underneath. This is especially worth thinking about if you’re doing yoga.

You usually have bare feet during the class, but you can take socks to put on at the end.

Online help for beginners

• The NHS Choices website has useful guides to yoga and pilates. Visit nhs.uk and search ‘yoga’ or ‘pilates’.
• For information about yoga, and to find a yoga class, you could try the British Wheel of Yoga website: bwy.org.uk
• For pilates classes in your area, try the Pilates Near You website pilatesnearyou.co.uk

Pilates promises flexibility and core strength

Can I practise at home?

If you’re just starting out on your yoga or pilates journey, going to a class will give you the confidence to know what you’re doing in a controlled and supported environment.

While it can be really useful to look at what might happen at a class on YouTube, you might want to avoid practising at home until you’ve been to a few classes.
Finding my motivation

Sarah Stones took the plunge and set up her own business after coming through treatment for breast cancer.

After 25 years of working in HR, Sarah decided it was time to set up her own company to help people identify, understand and increase their motivation.

‘I’d always had the idea that I wanted to work for myself,’ she says, ‘but was never brave enough.’

Sarah finally found the courage to go it alone after facing an altogether different challenge.

Thinking the worst

‘It was a complete bolt out of the blue,’ says Sarah of her breast cancer diagnosis in August 2014.

Eighteen months previously Sarah, who has cerebral palsy, had undergone a hip replacement operation after her mobility deteriorated.

‘After, I got really fit. I had been going to the gym twice a week. I was 46 at the time, and everything was going in the right direction.’

Then, one morning, Sarah felt a lump in her breast while in the shower.

A hospital referral quickly followed, and within weeks she had been diagnosed with cancer and had started chemotherapy.

‘I’m a very positive person,’ she says. ‘But all the people who I’d come into contact with who had cancer had died. I found it really difficult not to think the worst.’

Amazing support

Sarah says that in the normal course of events she doesn’t think about having cerebral palsy. ‘I just get on with life. But when I was diagnosed with breast cancer I thought: somebody’s being very unfair; I’ve got enough to deal with.’

Despite an initial problem with a surgeon who would only speak to her parents rather than addressing her directly, Sarah says the support from the hospital was amazing.

After she lost her hair, Sarah had some photos taken of herself without her wig on, which she posted on Facebook.

‘This was how I told the people I hadn’t wanted to ring,’ she says. ‘The messages and support were quite amazing and made a huge difference.’

Getting on with life

When coming through the end of treatment Sarah decided to set up Plain Sailing Motivation.

‘I thought: life is too short. You’ve got to get on with things.

‘I’d always enjoyed supporting people to find out what they really want to do.’

Sarah’s tip for anyone whose motivation has dropped during or after breast cancer treatment is to think about what motivated you before you started treatment.

‘For example, if being with friends is where you get your energy from, maybe arrange for people to come and see you at home, or go out but for a short time.

‘When you’re going through treatment, your motivators will be the same, but it’s very hard to do the things you normally would.

‘Try to focus on the things you can do.’

BECCA, the Breast Cancer Care app, has lots of motivational tips to help you after treatment.
I was on holiday in Florida when my daughter Katie told me she’d found a lump.

She’d had some tests already and had been called back. I flew home overnight and we went straight to the hospital appointment. That’s when they told us it was breast cancer.

Feeling helpless
At first you’re just in shock, you don’t have time to think. Katie had a nine-month-old baby and a four-year-old at the time, so it was all hands on deck.

I used to go there for the day and help with looking after the children, washing and cooking. But as a mum it’s difficult to know how much to do. I didn’t know if I should be taking over or giving them space. Who wants their mum there all day? Afterwards I’d sit outside in my car thinking, ‘How can I leave?’

Watching someone you love go through treatment is horrendous. Chemotherapy made Katie really ill. Most of her hair fell out. Normally mums make things better but there was nothing I could do. You feel helpless.

Finding support
As a family, it’s not always easy to talk to each other because you don’t want to upset anybody. You need to talk to someone on the outside. But I couldn’t talk to any of my friends because no one had ever been in this situation.

My daughter joined every social media group possible and talked to other women online for support. When she finished treatment she held a ball for Breast Cancer Care and raised £48,000. We came into the office to hand in the cheque and when she saw the Helpline she said, ‘I called here so many times and spoke to so many people!’

I thought, ‘Did you?’ I didn’t even know there was a Helpline. I wouldn’t have thought of calling it. I could see how important it was for her, but mums don’t realise there’s help for them.

Giving back
I decided to volunteer for Breast Cancer Care. I wanted to give something back and to help other mums.

I became a Someone Like Me volunteer three years ago and since then I’ve spoken to lots of mums.

When they first call they’re often scared. I talk them through their concerns and tell them they’re going to get through it. By the end of the call I can tell they’ve relaxed a bit and they say, ‘You’ve made me feel so much better.’ That for me is so worthwhile. It’s given me peace.

I would say to anyone supporting someone with breast cancer: talk about it. I wish I’d had someone to talk to who understood.

Everyone needs a little bit of support.

Sharon, whose daughter was diagnosed with breast cancer, now supports other mums going through the same thing.
We get a lot of calls to our Helpline from people who are feeling lonely after their treatment finishes,’ says Stephanie Jacobs from the Helpline team at Breast Cancer Care. ‘Some people live alone or have few people to talk to. Others have people around them but feel lonely and isolated by what they’ve been through.’

A change in direction

The end of treatment can be a difficult, emotional time. Many people feel lost when hospital appointments stop. Sometimes loved ones expect you to be ‘back to normal’ and getting on with things, but this isn’t always easy.

Even if a significant amount of time has passed since your treatment, you might still be processing what has happened to you. It can often feel as though people around you are carrying on as before while you’ve become a different version of yourself. This can make it difficult to maintain relationships you had before and to meet new people.

Find a new routine

Taking up a regular activity can help you make new friends and establish a new routine.

You could:
• join a local walking group, such as ramblers.org.uk
• start a weekly exercise class at your local gym or leisure centre, for example yoga or pilates, see page 10
• try a special interest group or adult learning association such as U3A (u3a.org.uk)

Even just going to the shops on a set day each week can help you get into the habit of going outside and interacting with people. The important thing is to start with what feels comfortable for you.

Take your time

If the thought of going out and socialising is too much, or you feel anxious or vulnerable, don’t force yourself.

Taking small steps can help. If you don’t feel up to a night out, go for a coffee with a friend. It can also help to agree to things knowing you can always cancel if you change your mind.

Talk to someone

While friends and family can be supportive, they may find it difficult to understand what you’re going through. This can make you feel ‘on your own’ even if you’re not.

Lots of people find it helps to speak to others who’ve had breast cancer, even if their experience isn’t exactly the same.

You could:
• go on a course to get practical tips and support, such as a Breast Cancer Care Moving Forward course. Visit breastcancercare.org.uk/moving-forward or call 0345 077 1893
• join a local cancer support group. Search the Macmillan Cancer Support website macmillan.org.uk for one near you
• find out about activities for people with cancer, such as those organised by charity Maggie’s (maggiescentres.org)

If you don’t want to go out or need to stay indoors for practical reasons, you could talk to someone by phone or email using Breast Cancer Care’s Someone Like Me service: breastcancercare.org.uk/ someonelikeme
Or you could try the Silver Line, a free confidential helpline providing information, friendship and advice to people aged 55 and over (0800 4 70 80 90).

You might also like to chat with other people on an online forum, such as breastcancercare.org.uk/forum. This can be particularly useful if you feel lonely late at night, or if you want to talk to others anonymously.

Over time, these small steps might increase your confidence and encourage you to socialise when you feel ready.

‘Counselling is a common source of support’

Ask for help

Many people feel they can’t ask for professional help once their treatment has finished, but it’s important to speak to your GP if you think you might need it.

‘[When treatment had finished] was the time that I felt most on my own. My husband arranged for me to go to a local cancer charity who organised counselling sessions and for the first time I was able to pour my heart out to someone who truly understood how I was feeling. I was shown that it was OK to feel like this and that my thoughts at this stage were perfectly normal.’

Sarah

Counselling is a common source of support for people who’ve experienced breast cancer. Talking to someone who doesn’t know you, and who’s there to listen, can be therapeutic. It can also be useful to have a set time and place to discuss things that might be worrying you, so you can put them aside at other times.

A counsellor or therapist can help you work through your thoughts and feelings and help you find ways to cope with loneliness and isolation.

Ask your GP about counselling services in your local area, or look on the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) website bacp.co.uk. Some services are free or means-based. Find out more about counselling on the NHS website: nhs.uk/conditions/counselling.

Breast Cancer Care’s Forum is a welcoming community who can offer practical and emotional support at any time of day or night. Visit breastcancercare.org.uk/forum.
Your questions answered

Breast Cancer Care's experts answer your questions about breast cancer and its treatments

Can I swim during radiotherapy?

**Q** I’m due to start radiotherapy and enjoy going to my local swimming pool. Can I still go during my treatment?

**A** You may be advised by your treatment team to avoid swimming during treatment and shortly afterwards. This is because radiotherapy can cause skin changes and these can be irritated by chlorine or chemicals in the pool. Also swimwear can cause friction at the treatment site.

However, if you don’t have any skin problems, it’s possible you can continue swimming, but check with your treatment team first. They may recommend that you rinse the treated area after swimming to remove any chlorine.

What is electrochemotherapy?

**Q** I have secondary breast cancer that has spread to the skin, and I’ve been referred for electrochemotherapy. What is this?

**A** Electrochemotherapy uses a low dose of chemotherapy together with electrical impulses. It’s given directly to the area being treated to relieve symptoms of secondary breast cancer that has spread to the skin.

The electrical impulses allow the chemotherapy drug to enter the cancer cells directly. It’s a local treatment, which means it will only have an effect in the area being treated.

It’s given under local or general anaesthetic, depending on the size of the area to be treated, and takes about 30 minutes. Afterwards, the area is covered with a dressing. The procedure can be repeated after a few weeks if necessary.

Electrochemotherapy usually causes few side effects because the dose of chemotherapy given is low. However, it can cause pain (usually mild), discharge from the wound or infection and sometimes nausea.
I recently had surgery for breast cancer. I heard that turmeric is good for overall health and might reduce the risk of my cancer coming back. Is this true?

There are frequent reports in the media about the potential benefits of vitamins, herbs and spices. As they’re considered to be natural products, it’s often assumed that they’re safe. However, vitamins and other supplements don’t have to comply with the same regulations or rigorous testing that conventional medicines do. And for many products, there’s a lack of research to support their use.

Turmeric is a spice that has been used in cooking for centuries. It can also be taken as a supplement. Scientists have been studying turmeric, and in particular one of its ingredients: curcumin. Research is ongoing to understand fully its possible benefits and harms. So far there’s no evidence that turmeric can reduce the risk of breast cancer developing, treat it or reduce the risk of it returning. Some research has found that turmeric supplements may stop some chemotherapy drugs used in breast cancer from working properly. But much more research is necessary to find out if they can cause harm.

Dietary supplements are not usually necessary if you have a healthy, well-balanced diet. At Breast Cancer Care we encourage anyone to speak with their hospital specialist, breast care nurse or GP before taking any supplements.

I’m 35, have been diagnosed with breast cancer and don’t know anyone the same age who’s had a similar experience. How can I get support?

Being diagnosed at a young age can be isolating as breast cancer is not common in younger women. Being told you have breast cancer can come as a huge shock; it can be particularly unexpected at your age.

Breast Cancer Care has a number of services specifically for women under 45. These include a two-day free residential event called Younger Women Together. There are workshops, wellbeing sessions and discussion groups. You’ll have the chance to learn, talk openly in a safe place, share experiences and be yourself.

Our Someone Like Me service has young volunteers who have had a personal experience of breast cancer and are trained to provide support. The volunteers are able to talk to you by email or telephone. You can find out more by calling our Helpline on 0808 800 6000.

The Younger Breast Cancer Network (YBCN) is a private Facebook group set up by young women who’ve had breast cancer. If you have a Facebook profile, you can message the main Facebook page and one of the administration team will help you join.
Sex after breast cancer: the survey

Over 800 women took Breast Cancer Care’s survey about sex and intimacy after breast cancer. We examine the results.

The numbers are clear: the majority of women (80%) who took Breast Cancer Care’s survey are unhappy with their sex life after breast cancer. When also asked if they were happier before diagnosis, 81% said yes.

And many women are being left in the dark and don’t know what to expect. Over two-thirds weren’t told breast cancer treatment could affect their sex life.

Of the women surveyed, 94% reported that a side effect of treatment had stopped them having sex.

Samia al Qadhi, Chief Executive of Breast Cancer Care, said: ‘These distressing figures paint a troubling picture of the everyday reality for countless women with breast cancer whose relationships and sex lives are side-lined.

‘It is crucial the taboo is broken. The NHS must ensure everyone has the opportunity to talk about sex, intimacy and altered body image to help get the support they need.’

Top five things that stopped you having sex after treatment

1. Loss of libido
2. Too fatigued
3. Low self-esteem
4. Menopausal symptoms like vaginal dryness
5. Feeling self-conscious about scars

of women are unhappy about their sex life after breast cancer

weren’t told about the possible impact of breast cancer treatment on sex and intimacy by a healthcare professional

didn’t get the support they needed around sex and intimacy
‘Our sex life ground to a halt’

Sharon Brooker, 44 from Peterborough, was diagnosed with breast cancer in August 2013 just a year after getting married and having her third child.

‘Breast cancer completely changed the dynamic of our relationship to patient and carer,’ she says. ‘Physical changes like hair loss and scars meant I didn’t think I was attractive anymore – I remember looking in the mirror and breaking down in tears as I didn’t recognise myself. As a result, our sex life ground to a halt and two years after my diagnosis we separated.’

Sharon separated from her husband for nearly 18 months.

‘Nobody mentioned breast cancer could affect my relationship or sex life. And while I’m now back together with my husband, almost five years later it’s still not easy. ‘There are ongoing side effects – like awful vaginal dryness – which can make sex painful. I find it depressing and hard to talk to my husband about.’

Sharon now supports women experiencing similar issues by volunteering with Breast Cancer Care.

‘I don’t want anyone to go through what I went through,’ she says, ‘so I let them know they’re not alone – and I want everyone to know help is available.’

Five tips for getting back to sex

1. **Get used to your body**
   
   Seeing yourself after treatment might feel upsetting, but the more often you look at and feel your body, the less different it will seem. Figure out what feels good by exploring your body again.

2. **Sort out side effects**
   
   Side effects of treatment, such as vaginal dryness, can stop you feeling in the mood. Using vaginal lubricants and moisturisers can help relieve pain and dryness and may put you more at ease.

3. **Communication is key**
   
   Talking openly with your partner about your feelings can help you understand each other’s needs. Too scary? Writing down and sharing these thoughts is a good first step.

4. **Take it slowly**
   
   Spend time with your partner with no sexual expectations – cuddling or hand stroking are ways to feel close to your partner.

5. **Experiment**
   
   Try different sexual positions until you find one that’s more comfortable. And of course, it’s not all about penetrative sex. Try self-stimulation, mutual masturbation or oral sex.

Breast Cancer Care is here for anyone who needs support on sex, intimacy and body confidence after breast cancer. Visit [breastcancercare.org.uk](http://breastcancercare.org.uk) to find out about face-to-face support or call our expert nurses free on 0808 800 6000.
Art and soul

Breast Cancer Art Project founder Adriana Ford tells us about an online art gallery for people affected by breast cancer, and how you can get involved.

What is the Breast Cancer Art Project?
The Breast Cancer Art Project (breastcancerartproject.com) is an online platform where people affected by breast cancer can share art, in all its forms, and experience the art of others.

Partaking in creative activities has proven benefits for mental wellbeing, and even physical health too.

The sharing part is important – some of the artworks really resonate with others who’ve had breast cancer, and it’s a way for friends, family, colleagues or even medical professionals to get a better understanding of what we’ve been through.

How did it start?
I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2016 when I was 34.

I was invited to take part in a research project, which offered the opportunity to create art related to our cancer experiences. I hadn’t done this before, and I don’t see myself as an artist.

I was assigned a mentor who gave me encouragement and feedback, and I created a painting called Healing With Gold (opposite) with a poem to go with it. Technically, my painting wasn’t very skilful, but that didn’t matter. I found it really therapeutic.

This led me to think others affected by breast cancer may also benefit from having a place to inspire them to be creative and to share their art. That’s why I created the Breast Cancer Art Project in October 2017.

Since then it has been flourishing, with over 100 pieces of art from more than 30 women.
What kind of art do you share?

We welcome art in all its forms, from drawings and paintings to all types of writing (poems, stories and non-fiction), music, photography, sculptures, crafts and things I’d never have even thought of.

For example, we’ve been sharing some of the Barbies Losing It series by Annie Dennison, featuring bald Barbies who have been through chemotherapy.

I’m always amazed each time something new arrives in my inbox!

Do you need to be good at art to contribute?

You really don’t have to be good at art. We welcome art from complete beginners through to professionals. The project is open to anyone who has been affected by breast cancer – women and men of any age, whether undergoing treatment or diagnosed decades ago.

Some of our paintings and poems are by those who haven’t done something like this for years, perhaps even since they were children. At the other end of the spectrum, we have art that’s been up in professional galleries.

Art can be healing, and for that you don’t have to be skilled at it, you just need to do it.

To see the artworks or contribute your own, go to breastcancerartproject.com
Let’s get seasonal

Make the best of seasonal fruit and vegetables with these delicious recipes from dietitian and food writer Jane Clarke.

Fruity beetroot cake
Serves 8–10

- 150g white self-raising flour
- 75g wholemeal self-raising flour
- 1/2 teaspoon bicarbonate of soda
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 175ml rapeseed or sunflower oil
- 225g light muscovado sugar
- 3 eggs, separated
- 150g raw beetroot, coarsely grated
- juice of 1/2 lemon
- 75g sultanas
- 75g mixed seeds, such as pumpkin, sunflower or linseeds (flaxseeds)

You’ll also need a 20.5cm x 9cm x 7cm loaf tin

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C. Lightly butter the loaf tin and line the base with baking parchment.
2. Sift together the flours, bicarbonate of soda, baking powder and cinnamon into a large bowl, then tip the bran left in the sieve into the bowl (if you want to keep it).
3. In another bowl, beat the oil and sugar using a food processor or electric whisk until well combined. Gradually beat the egg yolks into the oil mixture. Fold the beetroot into the mixture, then add the lemon juice, sultanas and seeds.
4. In a clean bowl, whisk the egg whites until light and almost stiff. Fold gently into the mixture using a large metal spoon.
5. Pour the mixture into the cake tin and bake for 50–55 minutes until risen and firm, covering the top with a piece of foil after 30 minutes. To check the cake is cooked, insert a skewer into the centre – the cake should be moist inside but not sticky. Leave to cool in the tin for 20 minutes, then remove from the tin and cool completely on a cooling rack.

Tip: to make it even softer to eat, serve with custard, cream or yoghurt.

Fold the flours and raising agents into the mixture while beating slowly.

Nourish by Jane Clarke

Nourish is a website and online community founded by dietitian, food writer and Cordon Bleu-trained cook Jane Clarke.

‘I set up Nourish based on my 27 years of looking after people living with cancer,’ says Jane. ‘Nourish helps people who are poorly, and their carers, to find pleasure, inspiration, comfort and, of course, nourishment from what they eat.’

The website features recipe ideas and nutrition basics, as well as evidence-based tips for people facing side effects of treatment like taste changes or loss of appetite.

‘The community is a place where people can come to talk about nourishment,’ says Jane. ‘I don’t think anybody should be defined by their illness.’

Visit nourishbyjaneclarke.com
Roasted aubergines with tahini

Serves 3–4 as a side dish, 2–3 as a main course

For the aubergines
• 2 medium aubergines, cut in half lengthways
• 100ml olive oil
• seeds from 4 cardamom pods, ground (optional)

For the dressing
• 2 tablespoons Greek yoghurt
• 1 tablespoon tahini
• squeeze of lemon or lime juice, to taste
• 2 teaspoons mint or basil leaves, torn
• sea salt and ground black pepper

1. Preheat the oven to 200°C. Put the aubergines in a roasting tin and drizzle with the olive oil, ensuring they’re coated. Season with salt, pepper and cardamom, if using. Roast for 40–45 minutes until soft and toasted, then leave to rest for 20 minutes.

2. To make the dressing, mix the yoghurt, tahini, lemon or lime juice and olive oil in a blender or with a whisk. Season to taste with salt and black pepper.

3. Pour the dressing over the aubergines, sprinkle with the mint or basil and serve.

Strawberry yoghurt fool

Serves 2

• 6 heaped tablespoons Greek-style yogurt
• juice of 1 orange
• 10 large, ripe strawberries, sliced into quarters
• freshly ground black pepper

1. Place the yoghurt and orange juice in a small bowl and gently combine until well blended.

2. Reserve 8 strawberry quarters for decoration. Place the remaining quarters in a small bowl and sprinkle with a little black pepper to enhance their flavour. Mash the strawberries with a fork until they’re soft but retain some texture, then combine with the yoghurt mixture.

3. Divide the fool between two small serving dishes or glasses and arrange the remaining strawberries on top.

Tip: Add the seeds of one passion fruit to the yoghurt mixture for extra flavour.
Breast Cancer Care’s support services are here for you, whenever you need them.

**Support for you**

**Someone to talk to**

**Helpline**
If you have a query about breast cancer, just want to talk things through or find more support, our nurses are at the end of a telephone line. Call our free, confidential Helpline on 0808 800 6000

**Someone Like Me**
Someone Like Me won’t just put you in touch with someone else who’s been affected by primary breast cancer. With a network of 200 trained volunteers, we’ll find someone who understands your individual concerns.

**Online support**

**Website**
The information on our website is written by clinical specialists, so it’s reliable and up to date. Whether your question is about going through treatment or living with breast cancer, you’ll find the answer on breastcancercare.org.uk

**Forum**
Whether you’re going through treatment, moving forward or living with secondary breast cancer, you’ll find someone who understands what you’re going through on our popular online discussion Forum.

**Face to face**

**Moving Forward®**
Adapting to life after breast cancer treatment can be difficult. Moving Forward short courses take place throughout the UK to empower you to live better with and beyond breast cancer.

**Living with Secondary Breast Cancer**
A diagnosis of secondary breast cancer can mean adjusting to difficult changes. These monthly sessions provide information, support and the chance to meet other people with secondary breast cancer.

**Younger Women Together**
Come to a Younger Women Together event and meet around 30 other women under 45 who’ve been diagnosed with primary breast cancer. You’ll have the chance to talk, share and be yourself.

**Find the right support for you**

Call 0345 077 1893
Visit breastcancercare.org.uk
Email services@breastcancercare.org.uk
Get involved

There are many ways to support Breast Cancer Care. Here are just a few

A Big Pink party

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and on 12 October incredible people are coming together to raise money.

Holding a Big Pink couldn’t be easier. Simply order your free fundraising kit, invite your friends, family or colleagues and have fun raising money.

Alex from Chelmsford held a Big Pink party at home last year.

‘It was a lovely day with supportive friends,’ she said. ‘It also doubled as a celebration as I was nearing the end of a year of treatment. I even sprayed my hair pink!’

Order your free fundraising kit today at breastcancercare.org.uk/thebigpink or call 0300 100 4442.

Show fashion

Kick off Breast Cancer Awareness Month in style this October at Breast Cancer Care’s annual fashion show, in association with Dorothy Perkins.

Join us in London or Glasgow and celebrate our inspirational models as they step on to the catwalk following a breast cancer diagnosis. With fashion, fundraising and fine dining, you’re sure to have an experience to remember.

Buy your tickets at breastcancercare.org.uk/theshow

Wonder walkers

Thank you everyone who took part in or volunteered at the Pink Ribbon Walks this summer. The events were a huge success and are on track to raise over £300,000.

To find out more and register your interest in the 2019 events, visit breastcancercare.org.uk/pink-ribbon-walk

Blissful balm

ELEMIS celebrates its 18th year in partnership with Breast Cancer Care with the launch of a limited-edition Pro-Collagen Rose Cleansing Balm and a £25,000 contribution to the charity. ELEMIS wants to encourage all women to feel confident to check their breasts regularly, and hopes the bright pink packaging serves as a reminder. Available online at elemis.com (RRP £68).

Raise a smile

Sensodyne is donating 15p from the sale of every limited-edition pack of Pronamel Strong & Bright Enamel. The toothpaste has a unique formulation that delivers minerals actively to help to strengthen your enamel. It also helps to polish away stains for brighter, whiter teeth. Available for a limited time from September.
Anita Care The most comprehensive range of breast forms, beautiful, supportive lingerie and stylish swimwear for all occasions. Designed to support women through all stages of treatment and recovery and to give confidence and comfort to those who have undergone breast surgery. Please call 01908 524048 or visit anita.com

Banbury Postiche Est.1931 is an NHS approved supplier that offers a fantastic range of acrylic wigs with a next day delivery service available. We have a Customer Care team to support you, whatever your needs. Our purely wigs range is guaranteed to have a style to suit and delight you. Please take a look at our website wigsuk.com or call 01295 757 408.

Beautifully you Struggling with body confidence and learning to be ‘you’ again? We can help. We specialise in helping women with, or recovering from, chronic illnesses to rediscover their beauty. With a pampering makeover, luxurious venues and beautiful portraits to remember your experience by, you will soon feel confident and like ‘you again’.
07947 608800 beautifully-you.photography/makeover-photographer

Chemo Headwear Award-winning luxurious handmade headscarves, bandannas, turbans and hats that will make you feel pretty and feminine. Offering a beautiful selection of Liberty prints, checks and plain fabrics that are all natural and breathable including cotton, silk, bamboo and cashmere.
10% discount when quoting ‘breastcancercare’ chemoheadwear.co.uk Telephone: 01798 861501.

Jennifer Effie’s Hair Solutions have created a bespoke hair replacement system for individuals that are undergoing cancer treatment. Our concept is to recreate how your hair looked before experiencing hair loss. Visit jehair.com to review our gallery, client testimonials and newspaper articles. Email: info@jehair.com Call: 020 3752 5089, 5 Upper Wimpole Street, London W1G 6BP.

Nicola Jane aims to restore confidence and femininity after breast surgery. Whether you have had a mastectomy, a lumpectomy or a reconstruction, our 2018 post-surgery lingerie and swimwear collection combines comfort and practicality with on-trend, fashionable styles. Free returns and shops throughout the UK. Call 03452 657 595 or visit nicolajane.com
Pebble UK supply armsleeves, gloves and gauntlets for the treatment of lymphoedema. With over 100 designs to choose from, these beautiful garments are made from seam-free, breathable, moisture wick fabric containing aloe vera for skin-friendly softness, and a fine knit construction for a lightweight feel. Call 0800 433 4757 or visit pebbleuk.com.

SILIMA.co.uk Home to the highest-quality and most realistic post-surgery breast forms available, plus a range of stylish and supportive bras from £18 each. Silima is a trusted supplier to the NHS with 40+ years’ experience in mastectomy care.

Visit silima.co.uk or call 01295 220 524 to request a catalogue.

Suburban Turban offers stylish, fashionable headwear and accessories for women experiencing hair loss. The collection offers styles for all occasions – from beautifully simple, super-soft jersey hats to chic berets and sparkling cocktail hats. We also offer a range of natural skincare products, chosen for their gentle, soothing benefits. To shop the range go to suburbanturban.com or call 01306 640 123.

TenderCush products are especially designed to offer comfort and support following breast cancer surgery. Our Shaped Cushion comes in gorgeous “cuddle-soft” fabric with a removable cover. Our fab patented Shoulder Bag offers discrete support when out and about, and looks and operates like an ordinary bag.

Available from tendercush.co.uk Tel 07980 470072

Womanzone ABC Introducing a Revolutionary Custom Made Breast Form, offering a Personal and Intimate Fit. We can offer an unrivalled service of care and advice, including Made to Measure Swimwear, free fitting and pocketing service. To see our latest ranges of swimwear, lingerie and prosthesis or to order an up-to-date brochure visit our website woman-zone.co.uk or call us on 01925 220 932.

Breast Cancer Care does not endorse any product advertised on these pages. Speak to your specialist team before buying compression garments for lymphoedema.
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We’d love to keep you updated about our work and provide you with other opportunities to get involved.
To hear from Breast Cancer Care by email please fill in your details below:

☐ Yes please, I’d like to hear from you by email

Email address____________________________________________________

We never give your information to other organisations to use for their own purposes. To change your preferences, or find out more information on how we use your data, please view our privacy policy at breastcancercare.org.uk/privacy-cookies or by contacting supporter services on 0345 092 0800.