

# VITA

The breast cancer magazine  
Issue 44 Spring/Summer 2023

## Expert exercise tips

To make exercising a healthy habit

## Post-surgery bras

What to look out for

## Talk through your worries

Finding support  
after treatment

## Secondary breast cancer

'People don't know what it means'

## The Chat

A ground-breaking new  
drama series

## Finding someone who 'got me'

helped me through the  
loneliest period of my life

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CANCER  
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[breastcancernow.org](http://breastcancernow.org)





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Whether it's cake in the garden with your friends and family, or a picnic in the park with everyone you know, sign up now and help us provide support for today and hope for the future.

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**BREAST  
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# WELCOME TO VITA

The phrase “It’s good to talk” might bring back memories of an old advertising campaign for a certain telecoms company. But it could equally be a theme of the new issue of Vita magazine.

For cover star Zahida, talking to someone who understood what she was going through had a profound effect after her breast cancer diagnosis.

Zahida found that person through our Someone Like Me service.

“I felt so empowered, and from that moment I never looked back,” she says. Turn to page 4 to read her story.

Elsewhere, we look at the benefits of talking through worries and concerns after treatment.

“Often we reassure people around us we’re ‘fine’ when we feel far from it,” says Tracey, who coordinates our Moving Forward courses. Turn to page 16 to read more.

Nowadays, the group chat is a familiar way of communicating with friends and loved ones.

The Chat is the UK’s first group messaging drama series, written and created by Breast Cancer Now.

It plays out through voice notes, messages, videos and pictures between four close friends as they navigate an unexpected breast cancer diagnosis together. Find out more on page 12.

Gareth Fletcher, Vita Editor

Get in touch: [vita@breastcancernow.org](mailto:vita@breastcancernow.org)

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## TELL US WHAT YOU THINK AND YOU COULD WIN A PAIR OF SKECHERS WORTH UP TO £100!

Let us know what you think of Vita by completing the 2023 Vita reader survey. You’ll help us know what you want from Vita and how we can improve the magazine.

Don’t forget to include your name and email address to enter our free prize draw. One lucky reader will win a pair of Skechers shoes worth up to £100.

To complete the survey head to [surveymonkey.co.uk/r/vitamag23](https://surveymonkey.co.uk/r/vitamag23) or if you prefer good old pen and paper, complete and return the questionnaire in the middle of this issue before 23 July 2023.

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.

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## Finding someone who 'got me' helped me through the loneliest period of my life

**Zahida Ramzan-Asghar was on maternity leave with her second child when she found a lump in December 2011. She talks about how our Someone Like Me service empowered her after her breast cancer diagnosis.**

**“W**e had just completed our family and things were going really well for us. I was getting ready to go back to work in January,” says Zahida, who was on holiday with her family when she found the lump.

She remembers not being immediately worried.

“I had been breastfeeding so thought the lump was just one of those things. But for some reason I told myself, ‘No, you have to get this checked’, so I rang my sister to make an appointment for me.”

Zahida’s GP wasn’t too concerned about the lump either. “I was young, fit and healthy, and had no history of breast cancer, but he sent me to the hospital for tests anyway,” she explains.

On 4 January 2012, Zahida was diagnosed with triple negative breast cancer.

### **Speaking to someone who understands**

Zahida says she found it hard to speak about her cancer.

“I’ve got a very strong support network – my husband, siblings, lots of friends – but I didn’t want anyone to know what I was going through. I was trying to protect them, so I didn’t tell anyone outside of my immediate family. It was the scariest and loneliest period of my life,” she recalls.

Then she found Breast Cancer Now online.

“I wasn’t sure what to expect, but I rang the helpline anyway. A lovely lady spoke to me, and she mentioned Someone Like Me.”

**“I wasn’t sure what to expect, but I rang the helpline anyway. A lovely lady spoke to me, and she mentioned Someone Like Me”**

Someone Like Me can put you in touch with a volunteer who has been trained to support. They could be someone who has personal experience of the challenges you’re facing or someone who can simply offer a listening ear.

The following day Zahida was told she had been matched with Gillian.

“Gillian was a similar age, had a similar diagnosis, and was from an ethnic minority background, like me,” Zahida says.

Even though Zahida had been matched with Gillian, she wasn’t sure whether the service was what she needed.

“I grew up in a Pakistani family. We don’t talk about cancer and we don’t access support,” she explains.

But the first call Gillian made to Zahida completely changed the course of her journey.

“I still remember exactly where I was when Gillian called me, the call had such a profound impact on me.

“Gillian answered all my questions and my fears. She reassured me there would come

a time where I would wake up and cancer wouldn’t be my first thought. I came away from our first call thinking, ‘If Gillian can do this, so can I’.

“I felt so empowered, and from that moment I never looked back.”

### **Becoming a volunteer**

Because Zahida gained so much from Someone Like Me, she was keen to become a Someone Like Me volunteer.

“I jumped at the opportunity as soon as it arose, and I invested so much energy into the application,” she says.

Ten years later, Zahida has supported nearly 150 women.

“Some of the women I have supported have gone on to become volunteers themselves. It’s like a ripple effect. I get quite overwhelmed thinking about it.

“Sometimes I do wonder whether my experience is still relevant 11 years on from my diagnosis, but the Someone Like Me service is about seeing someone who has been through a similar diagnosis and knows what you’re going through,” she explains.

**“I’ve got a strong support network but didn’t want anyone to know what I was going through”**

### **Giving back to the community**

For Zahida, some of the advice she heard from other people when she was living with cancer was frustrating.

“Everyone keeps telling you to be inspirational, to be strong. In hindsight they’re probably the wrong things to say because you don’t have to be strong all the time. In fact, people should be saying, ‘There’s support out there, why don’t you access it? Why don’t you speak to someone who may understand?’” she explains.

“It hit me that if I wanted change then I’ve got to put myself out there. If someone sees me talking about having access to support, it might just encourage them to do it too.”

Zahida now channels her experience into charitable work and giving back to the community. She’s part of a team of people who launched Safeena Cancer Support Network in April 2023.

Safeena Cancer Support Network provides a free befriending service supporting and helping Muslims affected by cancer, run by those who have gone through similar experiences.

Although aimed at Muslims, Safeena Cancer Support Network can be accessed by anyone. Visit [safeena.org.uk](https://safeena.org.uk)

When you’re facing breast cancer, it can help to talk it through with someone who’s been there too. For more information go to [breastcancernow.org](https://breastcancernow.org)

# How can I find the right bra after breast surgery?

**It can sometimes feel hard to find suitable bras after breast cancer surgery, reconstruction or radiotherapy. Ali Raven looks at some things to consider when looking for the right bra after treatment.**

## **What should I wear straight after surgery?**

Your surgeon or breast care nurse may suggest what bra to wear depending on the type of surgery you've had. You don't need to wear a specific post-surgery or mastectomy bra unless you're advised to.

If you're not given any advice about bras after surgery, you can check with your surgeon or breast care nurse what's best to wear.

In the first few weeks after surgery, most women wear a soft, non-wired bra that isn't too restrictive. You may find a front-fastening bra easier to put on as your shoulder may be stiff at first.

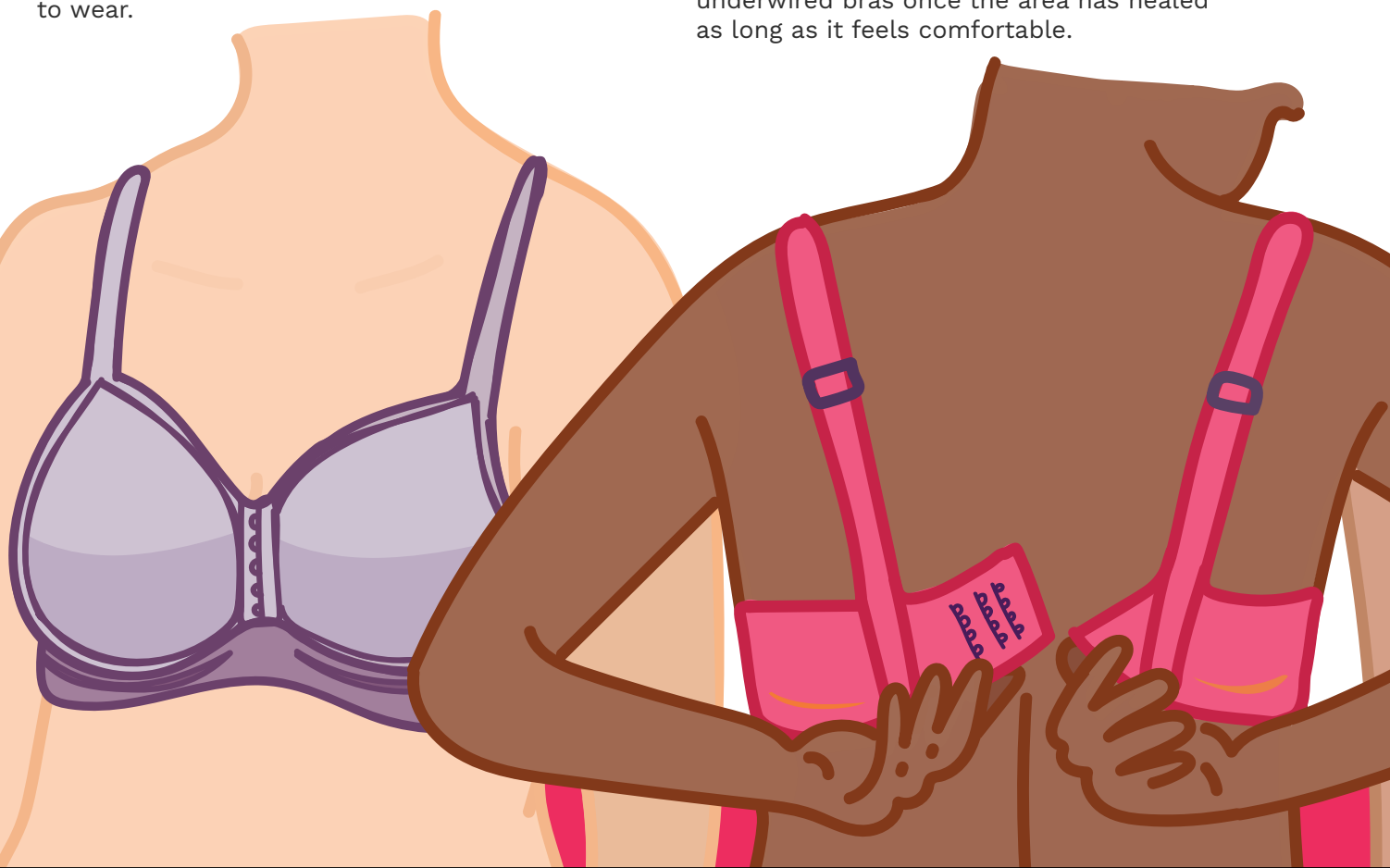
Our **Exercises after breast cancer surgery** leaflet has specific post-surgery exercises that can help ease stiffness.

## **TOP TIP**

A bra with a high cotton content is a good choice as it will be gentler on the skin while it heals. It'll also help you stay cooler if you have hot flushes.

## **Is it OK to wear underwired bras?**

It's best not to wear an underwired bra while you're healing as it may be uncomfortable. But it's OK to wear underwired bras once the area has healed as long as it feels comfortable.



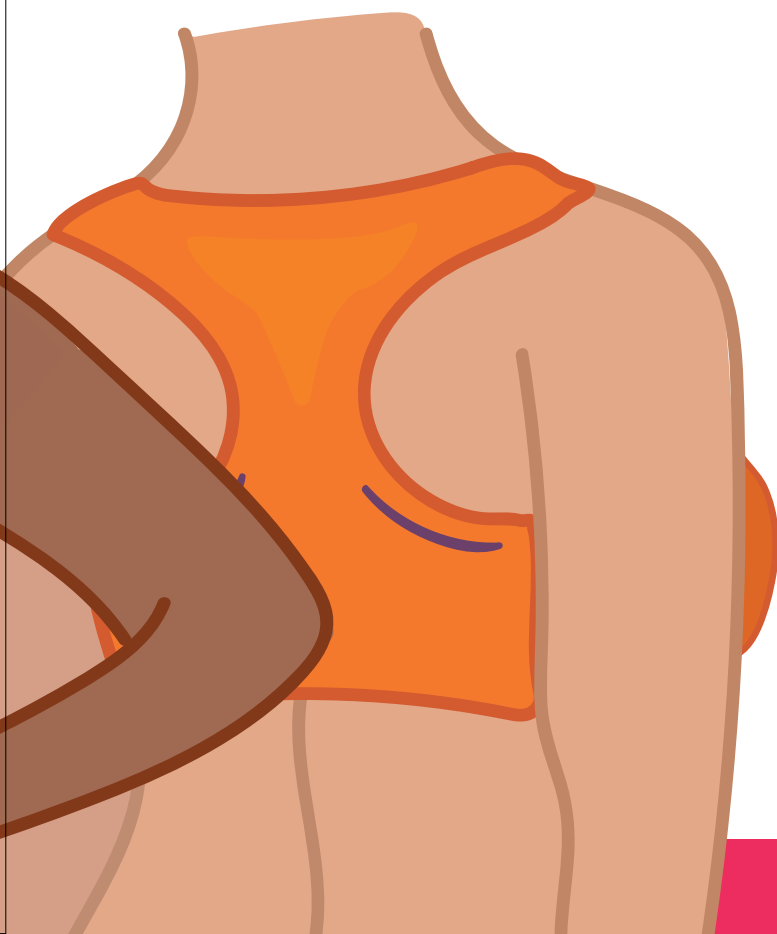
## TOP TIP

If you want to disguise a small difference between your breasts, a well-fitted padded bra can give a good shape.

## How to find the right fit

While you're healing after surgery, the nerves repair and any skin changes from radiotherapy settle down, you may want to choose a bra that has:

- Soft seams
- A wide underband – that's the band that goes under the cups and round your back
- Deep front and side panels
- Full cups
- Cup separation – the centre of the bra between the cups should sit flat on your chest
- Fully adjustable straps
- A simple design – details on the bra, like lace, can make it less comfortable
- No underwires – the wires sewn in under each cup



## Bras and breast reconstruction

If you've had breast reconstruction, you may be advised to wear a bra during the day and night to begin with.

Many women are concerned about finding comfortable and well-fitting bras after breast reconstruction. Your surgeon will advise what bra to wear depending on your type of reconstruction and how long you should wear it for.

## Bras and prostheses

If you're going to wear an artificial breast form – prosthesis – a well-fitting bra with a full cup is often all you need to hold your prosthesis in place.

Many women find this creates a natural appearance and is secure enough.

Some women prefer to have a bra with a pocket designed to help the prosthesis sit more securely in their bra.

Post-surgery bras come with bra pockets, or you can adapt an ordinary bra by sewing a piece of stretchy material across the back of the bra cup to act as a pocket.

Pockets are also available to sew in yourself. You can get these online from most post-surgery bra stockists.

## TOP TIP

Any bra can work with a prosthesis if it provides enough support to hold the prosthesis in place. Look for bras that have deep front and side panels and full cups.

You can find more tips on finding the right bra in our booklet **Breast prostheses, bras and clothes after breast surgery**.

Visit [breastcancernow.org/publications](https://breastcancernow.org/publications)



# EXPERT EXERCISE TIPS

to make activity  
a healthy habit

Exercising after breast cancer treatment has many benefits, from reducing fatigue to helping regain a sense of control. Ellen Millard pulls together some expert tips for getting into or back to exercise.

## Start small

Our exercise experts agree it's important to start small and build up gradually.

"Doing 5 to 10 minutes most days is better than 60 minutes one day and wiping yourself out for the rest of the week," says Helen Murray, Cancer Rehabilitation Instructor and MOVE Charity and 5K Your Way Ambassador (Wrexham).

Ed Nicholas, Programme Manager for Ramblers Wellbeing Walks, agrees. "Try exploring your local park or the countryside on your doorstep. Ramblers Wellbeing Walks start out at 10 minutes to give everyone the chance to take that first step towards a more active life."

We Are Undefeatable has created a handy Five in Five resource, which is a great way to help you get started with your own customisable mini workout.

"It's simple," says Peter Dutton, Activation Manager at We Are Undefeatable. "You choose 5 activities from our suite of accessible exercises and do each for 1 minute, creating a 5-minute mini workout."

## Make exercise a healthy habit

"One of the best ways to carry on with a new activity is to make it a habit," Ed explains.

A good way to do this is to set yourself a goal, but you should make sure this is flexible and adaptable.

"We understand that how you feel can change from day to day when living with a health condition and sometimes that can make moving more feel like a challenge," Peter says. "Getting active doesn't have to involve traditional exercise, and building activity into your routine can be a great place to start."

"Listen to your body," Helen adds, "and don't forget some days getting out of bed and having a shower is a win!"





## Where to go for expert exercise tips

**MOVE Charity**  
[movecharity.org](http://movecharity.org)

MOVE Charity aims to support and inspire people to MOVE Against Cancer through 5k Your Way support groups for all ages, MOVE educational resources and podcast, and an online programme for 13 to 30-year-olds.

**Ramblers Wellbeing Walks**  
[ramblers.org.uk](http://ramblers.org.uk)

With over 45,000 free walks across the country, Ramblers Wellbeing Walks spread the joy of walking together and help everyone take the first step towards a healthier and happier lifestyle. With short, accessible walks led by experienced volunteers, all you need you to do is pull on your shoes and head out.

**We Are Undefeatable**  
[weareundefeatable.co.uk](http://weareundefeatable.co.uk)

We Are Undefeatable is a movement supporting people with a range of long-term health conditions, developed by 15 leading health and social care charities, including Breast Cancer Now. Their purpose is to support and encourage finding ways to be active that work for you and your health condition.

### Exercise with other people

“If you find it difficult to motivate yourself on your own, moving more with friends and family can have many mental and social benefits – whether that be outdoors or moving in the comfort of your own home,” Peter explains.

“Include some of those friends who messaged you after your diagnosis saying, ‘Let me know if there’s anything I can do,’” Helen says. “Now is a good time to ask them to help you, whether it’s getting them to come for a walk with you, asking them to be your exercise buddy to help keep you accountable, or seeing if they’ll come along to your local MOVE Charity’s 5K Your Way group with you.”

Exercising together is a tip Ramblers Wellbeing Walks promotes. “Finding a local walking group like Ramblers Wellbeing Walks is a great way to help you take that first step,” Ed explains. “It’s more than just stretching your legs; it’s a chance to unwind, meet new people and become part of a whole new community of like-minded individuals.”

### Enjoy it!

Jackie Jarvis, author of *Transform Your Life by Walking*, found the emotional benefits of walking were exactly what she needed. “Having breast cancer in my early thirties, I woke up to the preciousness of life. At the time walking in nature helped me process the news, walk through the fears and come out the other side stronger and more connected.”

Jackie has since walked the Camino de Santiago routes in Spain, writing down her insights along the way.

There are lots of different ways to exercise, from swimming to yoga, so it’s important to find ones you enjoy.

Peter explains, “Whether it be cranking up the volume and dancing in the kitchen or going back to a sport that you previously loved, finding an activity that you enjoy means you are far more likely to keep doing it.”



# When life takes an unexpected turn, talk about it

An innovative new drama series explores the impact of a breast cancer diagnosis on a group of close friends. We take a look behind the scenes of The Chat.

It's early Wednesday morning. A new voice note has landed in The Girls' group chat.

**"HI, GIRLS... THIS IS NOT A MESSAGE I EVER EXPECTED TO LEAVE."**

Heather, the sender, has chosen this moment to break some life-changing news to close friends Jo, Pip and Lisa.

**"RIGHT. SO BASICALLY, I HAVE BREAST CANCER. OH, F\*\*\*ING HELL, THAT'S HARD."**

Welcome to The Chat.

## Groundbreaking drama

The Chat is a new drama series. But it's unlike any you will have experienced before.

In fact, it's the UK's first group messaging drama series. Which means you can experience it like you would any other group chat.

The drama plays out through messages, videos, voice notes and pictures sent between 4 close friends as they navigate an unexpected breast cancer diagnosis together.

Inspired by the real experiences of people with breast cancer, this is a familiar story told in a groundbreaking new way.

## Bringing The Chat to life

To make sure the characters, situations and conversation felt authentic, the team behind the chat spent a year working with a group of women who had faced breast cancer themselves. They also turned to the Breast Cancer Now forum as a source of frequently discussed topics.

As a result, The Chat feels true to life in how it explores the issues facing Heather and her friends, a bunch of down-to-earth, relatable women in their late 40s and early 50s.

Having an exceptional cast helps too. Main character Heather is played by BAFTA-winning actress Rakie Ayola. While some other familiar faces – Indira Varma, Kate Ashfield and Claudie Blakley – take on the roles of friends Jo, Pip and Lisa.

Ultimately The Chat highlights the importance of honesty when talking about difficult topics. And encourages us to question how we speak about breast cancer.



All episodes of The Chat are available now at [breastcancernow.org/thechat](https://breastcancernow.org/thechat)



# I've found people have no idea what secondary breast cancer means



**Joy Knott, who has been living with secondary (metastatic) breast cancer since 2011, explains why she believes it's important to be aware of the signs to look out for.**

When Joy started having problems with her breathing – a persistent cough, wheezing and breathlessness – she did not imagine they could be linked to the breast cancer she was treated for years earlier.

“At no point was I made aware of the signs and symptoms of secondary breast cancer,” says Joy, who was first diagnosed with breast cancer in 1998 at the age of 38.

“I visited the doctor a number of times and was treated for

chest infections and worsening asthma.”

Eventually Joy was referred to the hospital respiratory department, where a chest x-ray showed a partially collapsed lung.

It took several more weeks of scans, tests and a biopsy before Joy was finally told her breast cancer had spread to her lung – over a year after her symptoms started.

**“At no point was I made aware of the signs and symptoms of secondary breast cancer”**

## **An anxious time**

“This delay in diagnosis had a profound impact on me,” says Joy.

“It was a very anxious time involving a lot of tests and waiting for results. I spent a lot of that time researching secondary breast cancer online. I was very upset to read that it was incurable, something I was totally unaware of.

“I was also very poorly, too ill to go back to work before the summer break,” says Joy, who was teaching young children at the time.

“I just wanted to know what my diagnosis was and to start treatment.”

Joy's treatment for secondary breast cancer has included trastuzumab (Herceptin), hormone therapies, radiotherapy and surgery to her lung, as well as the targeted therapy abemaciclib and chemotherapy drugs paclitaxel and capecitabine.

“My original prognosis was one to three years maximum, so I have outlived that by a long way!”

## **Raising awareness**

Joy believes it's vitally important people are aware of the symptoms of secondary breast cancer.

“I think things have improved in that area in the years since my secondary diagnosis,” she says. “But I also think there is still a reluctance to scare women who have finished their breast cancer treatment.

“I've found that the general public have no idea what the term secondary breast cancer means or that it is in fact incurable.

“Since developing secondary breast cancer, I have devoted a lot of effort to raising awareness of what it is and how it can be identified.”

**If you have any symptoms that are new, don't have an obvious cause and don't go away, tell your breast care nurse or GP. Find out more about the signs and symptoms of secondary breast cancer**





## Your questions answered

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

**Q** I'm struggling to get an appointment with my GP. I'm worried about a new symptom. What can I do?

**A** If you have not been discharged from hospital, you can contact your breast care nurse or treatment team. If you have been discharged, your GP can refer you back in under two weeks if necessary.

It's common for the GP receptionist to ask why you need an appointment. This is to make sure you see the most suitable GP and to check if it's urgent.

If you explain your breast cancer history, the symptom you have and your concern, they'll hopefully offer you an appointment. This may be face to face or over the phone.

Sometimes it can be easier to get an appointment if you go to the surgery rather than trying to get through on the phone.

If you continue to have problems, it might help to speak with or email the practice manager.

**Q** I'm finding it hard to cope with hot flushes caused by hormone therapy. Do you have any tips?

**A** There are different ways to manage hot flushes. Your breast care nurse, treatment team or GP can help you navigate options such as medication, CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy) or complementary therapies.

Some tips to help cope with hot flushes include:

- Keep a battery-operated or paper fan at hand
- Wear loose-fitting, cotton clothing and removable layers
- Use a silk pillowcase, specially designed pillow that stays cool, or cooling scarf
- Keep a bottle of water with you
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol and spicy foods
- Carry a water spray to use on your face or wrists to cool you down

See our **Menopausal symptoms and breast cancer booklet** for more information



**Q What support is there for men with breast cancer? As a man recently diagnosed, I'd like to know what's available.**

**A** Because breast cancer in men is rare, it's common to feel isolated. It can help to talk to other men who understand what you're going through.

Our Someone Like Me service gives you the opportunity to talk on the phone or by email to another man who has had breast cancer.

You can also chat with others on our online discussion forum, where you can share tips and talk about what's on your mind.

The charity Walk the Walk offers monthly virtual meet-ups for men diagnosed with breast cancer. The online group allows men to share information and awareness, and support each other.

You can also call the nurses on our helpline to talk through your concerns and ask for more information.

**Q I've just finished treatment. Can you tell me the symptoms of secondary breast cancer I should be aware of?**

**A** Secondary or metastatic breast cancer happens when breast cancer cells spread to areas such as the bones, lungs, liver or brain.

Everyone's risk of secondary breast cancer is different. But if you notice a new symptom that doesn't have an obvious cause and lasts for more than a few weeks, tell your breast care nurse, treatment team or GP.

Symptoms to report include:

- Constantly feeling sick
- Severe or ongoing headaches
- A dry cough or breathlessness
- Lumps or swellings under your arm, breastbone or collarbone
- Discomfort or swelling under the ribs or across the upper abdomen
- Loss of balance, weakness or numbness of the limbs
- Pain in your bones that doesn't get better with pain relief or is worse at night
- Feeling constantly tired
- Altered vision or speech
- Unexpected weight loss or loss of appetite

You may find it helpful to read our booklet **After breast cancer treatment: what now?**

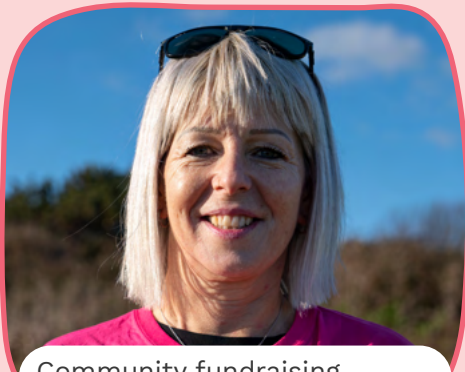


## ASK US

**Questions about breast cancer?** Call the helpline on 0808 800 6000 or visit [breastcancernow.org](https://breastcancernow.org) for information, to order publications or to find out how to Ask Our Nurses by email.

# We want you to be behind the breakthrough

Community fundraising volunteers Chantele Rashbrook and Kerry Banks felt inspired to help fund the next breast cancer breakthrough. You can help make life-changing research happen too.



Community fundraising  
volunteer Chantele Rashbrook

**“W**hen I was first diagnosed it was obviously a huge shock,” says mum-of-two Chantele. “It was a very emotional time for all the family.”

Chantele was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2012. Then, in the summer of 2014, she found out her cancer had returned and spread.

It was around this time, while having treatment for secondary breast cancer, that Chantele set about organising the first Clifftop Challenge with husband Phil.

“I was a keen runner and I thought: We need to do an event.

An event that’s different.”

Chantele started planning a route for a walk and run, from Hastings to Deal in her home county of Kent.

She decided the money raised from the Clifftop Challenge would go to Breast Cancer Now because of our life-changing research.

More people in the UK are being diagnosed with breast cancer than ever before – 14% more than 10 years ago. But research has the power to change this.

“Breast cancer research is the reason I’m alive,” she says.

“My children still have a mum for one main reason – researchers discovered a drug called Kadcyla. It means I’m still able to live life to the full, even with incurable breast cancer.

“The drug allows me to still be me.”

Chantele was surprised at how keen local people and businesses were to get involved.

“It’s an incredible feeling to know an event you’ve organised, and seen so many people enjoy, will help researchers better understand breast cancer and find new treatments.”

## An incredible family

Community fundraising volunteers are an important part of the Breast Cancer Now family. They play a crucial part in helping us be there for people affected by breast cancer. And we need more volunteers to fund research to better understand the disease.

“The Breast Cancer Now family is incredible to be part of,” says Kerry Banks.

“It’s the team. It’s the other volunteers. It’s all the support you’re given. Most of all, it’s the fact that you’re funding life-changing research.”



**“Anyone can be a community fundraising volunteer. I would say to anyone thinking of getting involved, just do it.”**





Dr Paloma Garcia, senior research fellow

Kerry started supporting Breast Cancer Now in 2006 after her close friend Julie was diagnosed with secondary breast cancer.

“Fundraising events I’ve done include a pink glitter ball, walks, runs, quizzes and a Boxing Day dip. I’ve met lots of people and had lots of amazing experiences.

“It’s fun being a community fundraising volunteer and it’s exciting knowing that you’re part of something so much bigger than yourself.”



Community fundraising volunteer Kerry Banks

## A rewarding experience

By signing up to be a community fundraising volunteer, you can support vital research and support – and open a door to rewarding new experiences.

There are many ways to raise money. Whether you fancy getting people together to do something sporty, to dine and dance, or to team up for a legendary quiz night.

You’ll have a Breast Cancer Now team member with you every step of the way.

They’ll help you bounce ideas around and plan your fundraising. They’ll check in with you regularly, and you can get in touch with them any time too.

You’ll also have access to a great range of resources to help you organise and promote your events.

“Don’t worry if you’ve never done any fundraising,” says Chantele. “It’s your enthusiasm that matters.”

Kerry agrees: “Anyone can be a community fundraising volunteer. I would say to anyone thinking of getting involved, just do it.”

## Researchers like Paloma will make a difference with the money you raise

Paloma wants to find ways to stop breast cancer spreading and resisting treatments.

Cells called breast cancer stem cells are usually responsible for breast cancer returning, becoming resistant to treatments and spreading to other parts of the body.

Paloma wants to understand more about these cancer cells so that researchers can develop treatments that target them.

Giving everyone with breast cancer the best possible chance of living well.

But alongside our expert researchers, your talents are needed too. You can be behind the next breakthrough in saving lives.

**Be a fundraising volunteer.**

**Sign up now at** [breastcancernow.org/fundraising-volunteer](https://breastcancernow.org/fundraising-volunteer)

**Talking about**

# worries after treatment

**If you've been through treatment for breast cancer, it won't come as a surprise to hear it's common to have worries and concerns once treatment has ended. But sometimes it's hard to know who to turn to for support.**

**W**hether you're dealing with ongoing effects of treatment or are worried about cancer returning, it's natural to have ongoing concerns once treatment has ended.

"You can feel like you have fallen off the edge of a cliff when your treatment comes to an end," says Tracey Rose, who is involved in developing and coordinating Breast Cancer Now's Moving Forward courses.

"One minute you have a plan, and the next you feel cast adrift. What now?"

"And since the pandemic, our anxiety has only increased."

Helpline nurse Carolyn Rogers points to other factors that may be contributing to some people's worries.

"We've noticed an increase in anxiety because of delays in appointments, tests and treatment, as well as difficulty getting through to GPs to report signs of a possible recurrence," says Carolyn.

## **Someone who understands**

"Very often we put on a brave face, reassuring the people around us that we are 'fine' when we actually feel far from it," says Tracey.

Family and friends may have 'moved on' and expect you to have done the same, so it can sometimes be difficult to find someone to talk to who understands.

That's where Someone Like Me comes in.

Someone Like Me can match you with a trained volunteer – over the phone or email – who's had a similar experience to you. And the support is available even after you've finished treatment.

Pat Leiper started volunteering with Someone Like Me in 2017, five years after her own treatment for breast cancer in 2012.

Pat says it's common for her to be matched with someone who has not long finished hospital treatment. Often, they want to talk about their experience of hormone therapy.

"One lady said I had given her hope when she was really struggling with how bad she was feeling," says Pat.

Pat recalls another woman who was still struggling emotionally three years after treatment. Her family didn't understand and thought she should be 'over it', there were upsets with friends, and work was difficult.

"We talked about communication, about her job, and what she was really wanting to happen.

"It was so good to listen to her on subsequent calls. She was re-evaluating lots of things, had had really good talks with her family, and felt able to reconnect with things she used to enjoy."



Finding someone to talk to who understands can make a difference

Small steps

As well as talking about concerns, it can help to have some strategies to draw on for when you're feeling particularly worried.

"Try a grounding exercise called 5, 4, 3, 2, 1," recommends Tracey.

Grounding exercises help you focus on the present moment and can distract you from anxious feelings.

"You can do this anywhere. You just name 5 things you see; 4 things you feel; 3 things you hear; 2 things you smell; 1 thing you taste."

Tracey also recommends spending less time on our phones.

"Scrolling through social media or using 'Dr Google' can raise anxiety," she says.

**"Often we reassure people we're fine when we actually feel far from it"**

It may also help to keep a worry diary.

"Set yourself a time each day when you dedicate some space to writing down all your worries," says Tracey. "Try not to overthink, or worry about spelling or repeating yourself, just let it flow."

"Outside this time, when worries surface, put them to one side for your worry diary the next day."

Your GP or breast care nurse can tell

you about support for anxiety, such as talking therapies. Organisations like Anxiety UK ([anxietyuk.org.uk](http://anxietyuk.org.uk)) also offer support to help you cope with anxiety.

"Be gentle with yourself and take things slowly," says Tracey. "Small steps can get you where you want to be."

Finding someone to talk to

Moving Forward courses take place face-to-face or online. Through supportive, open conversations in a safe, confidential space, you'll connect with people who understand.

Whatever your question or concern, you can call our helpline on 0808 800 6000 or Ask Our Nurses by email.

Someone Like Me can match you with a trained volunteer who's had a similar experience to you.

To find out more visit [breastcancernow.org](http://breastcancernow.org)



# THREE NEW BREAKTHROUGHS IN BREAST CANCER RESEARCH

Our scientists are working hard to increase our understanding of breast cancer. And they've made some amazing discoveries. Edd Jones picks 3 research breakthroughs and explains what they mean for people living with breast cancer.

## New way to improve breast cancer treatment

At the University of Manchester, our scientists have discovered a new way to potentially boost breast cancer treatment.

Dr Ahmet Ucar and his team found that a protein in human cells called RAC1B can help the disease become resistant to treatment, spread and return.

RAC1B is a less common variant of the protein RAC1, which helps maintain the health of all organs. Because it's such an important protein for the body, scientists haven't looked much at targeting it for cancer treatment.

However, Ahmet discovered that RAC1B plays an important role in breast cancer. He found that



Dr Ahmet Ucar

RAC1B can help breast cancer stem cells. These cells can cause cancer to become resistant to treatment, spread and come back.

The researchers also discovered that in mice, breast cancer stem cells without RAC1B could not form tumours. Even after 100 days. Cancer cells without the protein were also more vulnerable to a type of chemotherapy.

Ahmed and his team hope that targeting RAC1B could hold the key to improving existing breast cancer treatments.

## Discovering how breast cancer cells spread to the lungs

Our scientists recently uncovered a way that breast cancer cells can be triggered to form secondary tumours in the lungs.

Professor Clare Isacke and Dr Frances Turell, from the Institute of Cancer Research in London, found a protein that helps “wake up” cancer cells that have spread there.

Sometimes, breast cancer comes back in another part of the body. This is called secondary breast cancer. And although it can be treated, it can't be cured.

For people with oestrogen receptor positive breast cancer, the risk of cancer returning in another part of the body can continue for years after their initial diagnosis. That's because some breast cancer cells can stay inactive and “hide” before growing into secondary tumours.

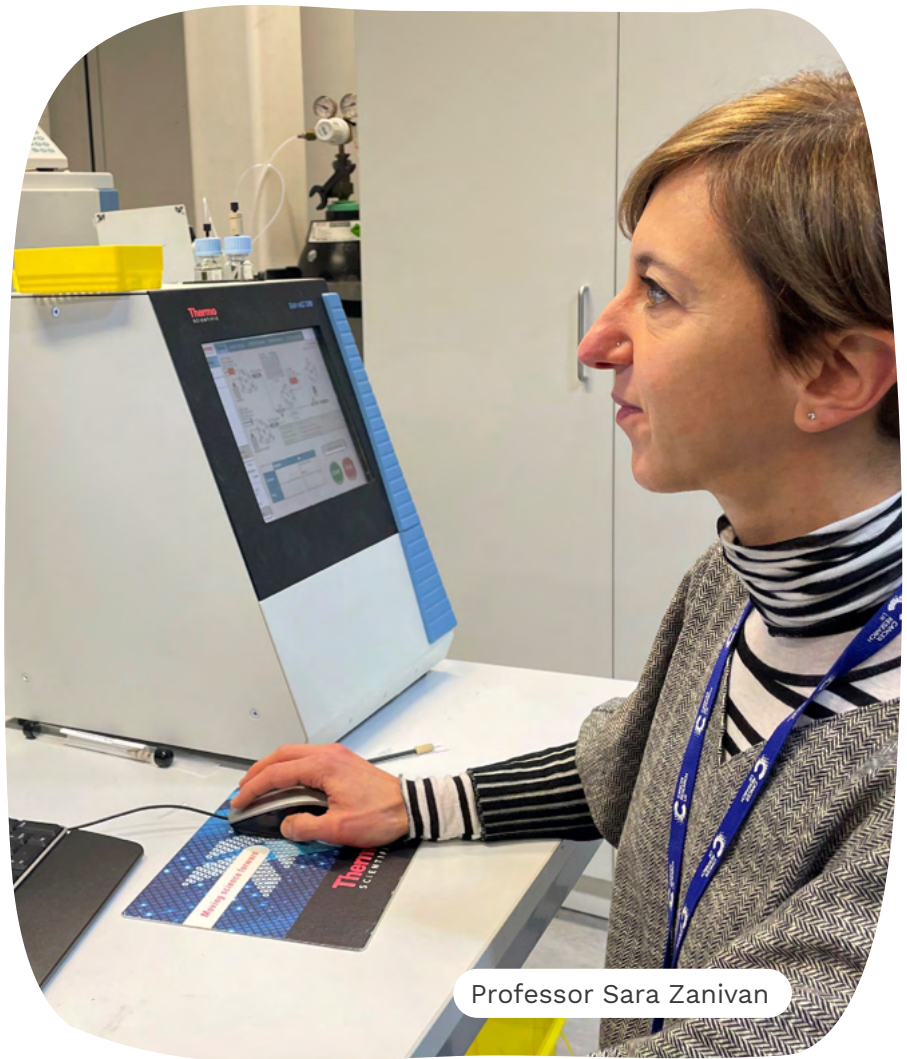
The researchers found that a protein called PDGF-C plays a major part in reactivating these inactive cancer cells. This protein lives in the lungs, a common place for breast cancer to spread to. And levels of the protein



Dr Frances Turell

increase when we get older, or when the lungs become damaged or scarred. The researchers found this can trigger inactive breast cancer cells to wake up and form secondary tumours.

The researchers now want to better understand how patients might benefit from a drug called imatinib, which targets the effects of PDGF-C. In the future, they hope to create more treatments that target the “reawakening” process.



Professor Sara Zanivan

### Finding weaknesses in cells that help cancer to grow

At the Beatson Institute in Glasgow, Professor Sara Zanivan found new weaknesses in a type of cell that can help cancer grow and spread.

The researchers looked at cells called CAFs (cancer-associated fibroblasts), which make a “scaffold” that can help cancer be more aggressive.

Sara and her team discovered that a key component of this scaffold is a molecule called proline, which is made by a protein called PYCR1. When the researchers stopped PYCR1 from

working and producing proline, the CAFs stopped making the scaffold.

These results show that CAFs rely on these 2 key molecules to make the structure that supports cancer to grow and spread.

The scientists hope that by identifying the role of PYCR1 and proline, they’ve found a potential new target for breast cancer treatment.

They now need to do more research to better understand how these two molecules could be targeted. And what drugs they could use to target them.

This is just a taste of some of the exciting research we fund. Our researchers make life-saving research happen in labs across the UK and Ireland. If you’d like to find out more about our research visit [breastcancernow.org/researchprojects](https://breastcancernow.org/researchprojects)





# Be behind the breakthrough.

More people are being diagnosed with breast cancer than ever before. We need your help now to fund research and help save lives. Behind every breast cancer breakthrough is our family of fundraising volunteers.

Will you join us and help fund more life-saving research?

**Be behind the breakthrough. Be a fundraising volunteer.**  
Sign up now at [breastcancernow.org/fundraising-volunteer](https://breastcancernow.org/fundraising-volunteer)



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