

# VITA

The breast cancer magazine  
Issue 43 Winter 2022

## Research news

Exciting upcoming projects

## Exercises to build strength

From the comfort  
of your home

## Supplements and breast cancer

Everything you  
need to know

## Breast cancer in men

**BREAST  
CANCER  
NOW** The research &  
support charity

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

**People thought I  
should skydive or  
climb mountains**

I just wanted to regain some  
normality after treatment



# For that 'laughed more than I cried' feeling

No one should have to face breast cancer alone. Someone Like Me is here to help you find someone who gets it.

However you're experiencing breast cancer, we're here.

Find free specialist support at  
[breastcancernow.org/someone](https://breastcancernow.org/someone)

**BREAST  
CANCER  
NOW** The research &  
support charity

Breast Cancer Now is a charity registered in England and Wales (1160558), Scotland (SC045584) and the Isle of Man (1200).



# WELCOME TO VITA

Real life stories will always be at the heart of Vita magazine. And the stories in this issue capture some of the many ways breast cancer affects different people's lives.

When Sheena finished her hospital treatment, she wanted more than anything to get back some sense of normality. Dealing with the effects of treatment – like hair loss and menopausal symptoms – made returning to work challenging, and Sheena felt very self-conscious at first. But for her, going back to the office was the right thing to do. Turn to page 4 to read Sheena's story.

Laura was first diagnosed with breast cancer 10 years ago. She turned her experience of having cancer as a younger woman into a novel, which was published this year. Writing a book was a childhood dream of Laura's, and you can find out more on page 10.

Phil was one of around 370 men diagnosed with breast cancer every year in the UK. He wants to raise awareness of breast cancer in both men and women, and to offer support to anyone else in his position. To read Phil's story, head to page 11.

Finally, Rebecca lost her mum to breast cancer in 2021. A keen runner, Rebecca took on an incredible running challenge in memory of her mum. You can find out more on page 18.

**Gareth Fletcher, Vita Editor**

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



Cover photo: Derek Anderson

## In this issue

### Real lives

- 4 People thought I should skydive or climb mountains
- 10 Writing a book was my therapy
- 11 Being told I had breast cancer was mind blowing
- 18 Enduring love

### Features

- 6 Caring for your skin this winter
- 8 Dietary supplements and breast cancer
- 14 Six simple exercises to build strength

### Regulars

- 12 Your questions answered
- 16 Breast cancer research



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.

Vita Editor: Gareth Fletcher; Design: Katy Feek. Breast Cancer Now is a company limited by guarantee registered in England (9347608) and a charity registered in England and Wales (1160558), Scotland (SC045584) and Isle of Man (1200). Registered Office: Fifth Floor, Ibex House, 42-47 Minories, London EC3N 1DY. Find out more at [breastcancernow.org](http://breastcancernow.org)

ISSN 1751-3081 © Breast Cancer Now, November 2022. All rights reserved. Vita is a FREE magazine. It is not to be sold, hired out, or otherwise reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without the written permission of the copyright holder.

# People thought I should skydive or climb mountains

After finishing treatment for breast cancer, what Sheena Nimmo really wanted was to regain a sense of normality. She tells us how going back to work and volunteering have helped her move forward.

The day before she was due to have surgery for breast cancer, Sheena went for a walk with her partner and remembers thinking how strange it was that she didn't feel unwell.

'I thought, I feel fine, I look fine, I don't feel ill. Yet I've got this thing in me that might kill me if I don't do something,' says Sheena, who was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2009, shortly after her 47th birthday.

Her consultant initially proposed a lumpectomy followed by radiotherapy.

'I thought I'd be off work for two or three months and then everything would be fine,' says Sheena.

Tests after surgery showed the cancer was more extensive than originally thought, and Sheena was advised that she needed a mastectomy and lymph node clearance, followed by chemotherapy.

'At that moment I stopped listening,' she says. 'I just heard "chemotherapy" and thought about losing my hair. That was probably the worst moment.'

Sheena says she tolerated the treatment better than expected.

'I got the opportunity to use a cold cap and I didn't lose my hair. I had a few bald patches, and my hair was very thin and grey, but I didn't wear my wig at all.

'I built the treatment up to be so horrendous but it turned out not to be anything like as bad as I expected.'

## Back to work

When the time was right, Sheena was keen to get back to her job in financial services.

'Lots of people said to me: Why are you coming back to work? Why wouldn't you go and do your bucket list?

'People seem to think that if you've survived breast cancer you should want to go and skydive or climb mountains. But I said I just want to get back to normality.'

Going back to work was nerve-racking and Sheena felt self-conscious returning to the office.

'My desk was as far away as you could get from the lift. I remember walking through the office thinking everybody's looking at me, looking at my short hair. Everyone knows I've got a prosthesis.

'The chemo had kicked me into the menopause too. So not only was I conscious of my prosthesis and my hair but there was often sweat running down my face too!'

During a particularly bad hot flush in a meeting, a well-meaning colleague mistakenly thought Sheena was about to faint.

'He was really kind and rushed over with a glass of water, basically highlighting what was going on. I remember thinking, this is awful!'

'Day-to-day things like that were hard but going back to work was definitely right for me.'

## Making a difference

Sheena, whose aunt had breast cancer, was used to checking her breasts regularly when she found her lump. She went to her GP and was immediately referred to the breast clinic.

To find out about Public Health talks covering important breast cancer information, visit [breastcancernow.org/healthtalks](https://breastcancernow.org/healthtalks)





She's keen to pass on the breast awareness message by delivering Public Health talks for Breast Cancer Now.

Sheena is one of a number of trained volunteers who give Public Health talks to workplaces, community or religious groups, and other organisations. The talks raise awareness of breast cancer symptoms, the importance of early detection, causes and ways to reduce risk, and breast screening. They also help dispel myths and misconceptions.

'I've delivered talks in all sorts of places,' says Sheena. 'I was invited to a Women's Institute meeting where I judged the floral arrangements and marmalade, and then gave my Public Health talk.'

While the talks moved online due to Covid, face-to-face talks have recently resumed.

One memorable talk was to a group of women whose first language wasn't English.

'Some of the women were reluctant at the beginning, we could tell they weren't keen to be there,' says Sheena, who delivered the talk with another volunteer.

The women had lost friends to cancer and were suspicious of treatments like chemotherapy.

'After we told them we were diagnosed seven and ten years ago, they were immediately engaged.'

'They were astounded to meet two women who were living well having had cancer ten years ago.'

### A huge moment

Today, breast cancer no longer looms large in Sheena's mind.

'The thing that surprises me is that some days I don't even think about it,' she says.

'Even after the end of my treatment, every morning when I woke up it was on my mind.'

'But then there was a day when I suddenly realised: I didn't think about it yesterday.'

'That was a huge moment for me, when it dawned on me that breast cancer wasn't the first thing on my mind. Because it had been for a long time.'



# Keep your skin in top shape this winter

Page design by Amy Asher

Lizz Bricknell shares some tips and products for keeping your skin in good condition through the colder months.

Seasonal changes and cold weather can wreak havoc on your skin, causing it to feel dry, tight or itchy. Many women also notice increased dryness of their skin following the menopause, and radiotherapy can cause dry skin too.

Try the tips and products on these pages to help keep your skin in good condition through the winter months.



**Face**  
NIVEA nourishing day cream has been created for dry and sensitive skin, and offers sun protection, which is still important in the winter months. Enriched with natural almond oil, this cream keeps the skin moisturised for up to 24 hours.

£4.15 from [superdrug.com](https://www.superdrug.com)



**Lips**  
Protect your lips from cracking in cold weather with The Body Shop Hemp heavy duty lip care, which contains hydrating hemp seed oil.

£5 from [thebodyshop.com](https://www.thebodyshop.com)

## SKINCARE DURING OR AFTER RADIO THERAPY

Radiotherapy can cause skin to feel sore, dry, itchy or flaky. Your radiotherapy team will give skincare instructions, but it may help to:

- Wash the treated area gently with warm water and pat the skin dry with a soft towel
- Speak to your therapeutic radiographer if you want to use any products on the skin in the treatment area
- Avoid exposing the treated area to very hot or cold temperatures during treatment, such as hot water bottles, heat pads, saunas or ice packs
- Avoid exposing the treated area to the sun while having radiotherapy and until any skin reaction has settled down
- Be aware that skin changes from radiotherapy can be irritated by chlorine or other chemicals in swimming pools





### Hands

Made with colloidal oatmeal, the Daily moisturising hand cream from Aveeno is fast-absorbing, non-greasy and unscented, making it perfect for daily use to keep hands smooth and soft.

£3.99 from [boots.com](https://www.boots.com)



### Body

Gentle, fragrance-free and effective for very dry skin, CeraVe moisturising cream contains hyaluronic acid and ceramides to lock moisture into the skin.

£16 from [boots.com](https://www.boots.com)



### All over

Weleda Skin Food is loved by many for a reason. This intensely nourishing cream has multiple uses and contains organic rosemary, calendula and camomile extracts.

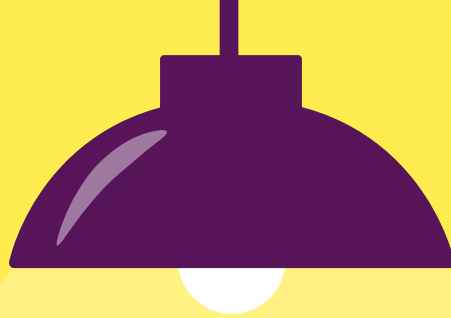
£13.50 from [weleda.co.uk](https://www.weleda.co.uk)

## TOP TIPS FOR DRY SKIN

- Try not to shower or bathe in very hot water, as this can increase dryness
- Avoid soaps or shower gels that contain fragrances or SLS (sodium lauryl sulphate), as these can strip the skin of natural oils
- Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water and caffeine-free drinks at regular intervals
- Wear clothes made from natural fibres – such as cotton or silk – that don't irritate the skin

You'll find more skincare tips in our booklet *Radiotherapy for primary breast cancer*. Order at [breastcancernow.org/publications](https://breastcancernow.org/publications) or call the Helpline on 0808 800 6000.





# Supplements under the spotlight

**Determining whether it's helpful or safe to take supplements after a cancer diagnosis can be a challenge. With the help of a dietitian, we look at what you might need to consider.**

**B**rowse the shelves of any large supermarket, high-street pharmacy chain or health and wellbeing store, and you're likely to be greeted by a bewildering array of supplements, from vitamins and minerals to herbal remedies and probiotics.

Some supplements are recommended for everyone, regardless of whether they've had cancer.

'Vitamin D is a good example,' says Dietitian Adele Hug. 'We're all recommended to take a vitamin D supplement in the winter months, if not all the time.'

Sometimes a specific supplement, such as calcium or vitamin D, is recommended alongside certain cancer treatments.

'These are treatment-related dietary supplements,' says Adele.

Supplements may also be given if someone lacks certain essential nutrients, such as vitamin D or iron, in their diet, known as having a deficiency.

But how do you know if you should be taking a particular supplement?

'Generally, if it's something that's needed with a treatment, it will be prescribed,' says Adele.

## Risks and benefits

A common reason for taking supplements might be to try to alleviate certain side effects of cancer treatment.

'Often people with breast cancer have menopausal symptoms,' says Adele, 'and are exploring different ways of managing them.'

'There are herbal supplements that have been thought to impact symptoms.'

However, Adele says often there isn't enough evidence to recommend them; or there's evidence that they can have a negative effect; or we simply don't know what effect they might have.

When it comes to alleviating menopausal symptoms, supplements such as black cohosh and red clover are not recommended for people with breast cancer. Evidence on their effectiveness and safety is limited and conflicting.

On Breast Cancer Now's online Forum, plenty of people ask about the potential benefits of



supplements, from whether taking collagen can help with skin, hair and nails to whether mushroom supplements might help boost the immune system.

‘If anyone is thinking about taking something, it’s best to chat with a healthcare professional to make sure the benefits outweigh any risks there might be,’ says Adele.

This is particularly important if you’re having treatment for breast cancer as some herbal products can affect the way certain cancer treatments work.

### Reliable information

Adele is keen to point out that when supplements are recommended to people with breast cancer, it’s always alongside, and not instead of, medical treatments.

According to Cancer Research UK: ‘There is no reliable evidence that dietary or nutritional supplements can prevent, cure or control the growth of cancer.’

It’s also worth remembering that dietary supplements in the UK are regulated in the same ways as foods, rather than medicines.

‘Unlike drugs, where processes in production and manufacturing are much stricter, the supplement industry isn’t very well regulated,’ says Adele.

So where can you go to find reliable information about what effects supplements might have and whether they’re safe?

Adele recommends the Memorial Sloane Kettering Cancer Centre website: [mskcc.org](http://mskcc.org)

### Encouraging research

Whatever someone’s reason for exploring a particular supplement, Adele always recommends talking to a healthcare professional about what they’re trying to achieve.

‘Because we might be able to explore other ways of achieving the same thing without an expensive supplement that might do more harm than good,’ she says.

‘Whether it’s support for their cancer or their side effects, there’s usually something we can recommend that’s safe.’

The good thing about curiosity and exploration by people with cancer is that it encourages more research, says Adele.

For example, worries about the safety of consuming soya after a breast cancer diagnosis led to an interest in research in this area.

‘Now we know soya foods are safe and may be beneficial,’ says Adele.



### Other recommendations

While it’s natural to want to do everything possible to be healthy after a cancer diagnosis, Adele believes it’s important not to lose sight of the things we know to be beneficial.

The World Cancer Research Fund encourages people to follow its recommendations after a cancer diagnosis. These include moving more; eating a diet rich in wholegrains, vegetables, fruit and beans; and limiting or, if possible, avoiding alcohol.

If you have any questions about, or need support with, diet or exercise after treatment, it can help to speak to a GP or your treatment team.

‘These are things we know have a proven benefit,’ says Adele, ‘compared to other things that could have a risk but for a tiny benefit.’

To order a copy of Breast Cancer Now’s booklet **Diet and breast cancer** visit [breastcancernow.org/publications](http://breastcancernow.org/publications)



# Writing a book was my therapy

**A decade after her diagnosis, Laura Price found writing her novel, *Single Bald Female*, not only helped her process her grief but also provided her legacy.**

I have written a diary since I was a little girl, but for some reason, when I was diagnosed with breast cancer at 29, I stopped.

There's an entry from June 2012 where I told myself I'd be just fine, then nothing, until I finished treatment eight months later.

I didn't stop writing entirely – I blogged my way through surgery, chemo and radiotherapy – but my upbeat, humour-laden articles didn't reflect the real fear and sadness I felt.

I'm sad I can't read my journals from that time, but I made up for it with my novel, *Single Bald Female*.

## Using my voice

I was single throughout my treatment. While my friends were busy getting married, I was huddled under a duvet, watching their love stories unfold on Instagram.

By the time active treatment ended, I wanted to meet someone, but was unsure what to write on my dating profile. I settled on the truth, listing myself as a 'single, bald (possibly infertile) female'.

When a blog I wrote about my dating experience went viral, I realised how little information there was about young women and cancer, and that I could use my voice to help others.



Laura was first diagnosed with breast cancer 10 years ago (photo by Krishanthi Puwanarajah)

## Processing grief

Four years later, I began to write. Instead of memoir, I opted for fiction, creating characters, friendships and love stories to escape my own world.

Although cancer is the saddest of subjects, I peppered the novel with humour – I wanted it to be uplifting, because no one wants to read a book that makes them cry from start to finish. The novel isn't about my own life, but writing it helped me process my grief.

*Single Bald Female* was published in April 2022 and seeing it in the window of Waterstones was one of the proudest moments of my life. Cancer may have taken away my chance of motherhood, but I had created my own legacy.

## Fulfilling a dream

Then, just three months after my book launch, after suffering from pain in my sternum, I found out the cancer had spread to my bones and was now incurable.

A whole 10 years had passed since my primary diagnosis. I was distraught – I had only just met the love of my life – but I also found myself filled with gratitude.

I had a whole decade of being cancer-free, and I stuffed it full with life. I wrote the book I'd wanted to write since I was that little girl scribbling in her diary.

As every cancer patient knows, life is short, and there's no point putting off your dreams for some distant future day. I fulfilled my childhood dream to write a novel and I'm so proud of it.



*Single Bald Female* (Pan Macmillan) by Laura Price is out now.



# Being told I had breast cancer was mind blowing

Six years after his diagnosis, Phil Alderson is keen to raise awareness of breast cancer in both men and women, and to offer support to others in his position.

Phil noticed something wasn't right one Sunday evening in the summer of 2016.

'I was playing with my daughter and she elbowed me in the chest. Later that night I could feel a small lump behind my left nipple,' says Phil, who was 44 at the time. Phil saw his GP the next day, and the following

week made his way to an appointment at the breast clinic.

'I thought it would be a formality, that I'd turn up and they would say it's nothing to worry about,' he says.

*'I was playing with my daughter and she elbowed me in the chest. Later that night I could feel a small lump behind my left nipple'*

'At no point did I imagine they were going to tell me it's probably cancer. It was pretty mind blowing.'

## BREAST CANCER IN MEN

Around 370 men are diagnosed with breast cancer each year in the UK. The most common symptom is a lump in the chest, which is often painless.

Most men who get breast cancer are over 60, but it affects younger men too.

The exact cause of breast cancer in men is not fully understood. Breast Cancer Now's Male Breast Cancer Study is looking into the causes.

The most common treatment for men is a mastectomy.



Phil is keen to support other people in his position

After a biopsy confirmed his diagnosis, Phil had a mastectomy to remove the cancer. He was then given the hormone therapy drug tamoxifen, which he would take for the next five years.

'The big side effect for me was tiredness; I felt incredibly tired all the time,' says Phil, who finished taking tamoxifen in September last year. As well as 'outstanding' care from the NHS, Phil says he benefited from Breast Cancer Now's Someone Like Me phone support service.

'I got matched with a guy in London,' says Phil, 'and we spoke three or four times.'

'He gave me his perspective and it was good because it was

someone I could talk to who wasn't related or close to me. I felt I could be completely honest.'

Honesty is important to Phil, who's keen to share his story in the hope it may help other people.

'I'm completely open about how I found the cancer and what happened to me,' he says.

'Some men don't even talk about their diagnosis to their friends or family because of the possible stigma, which really needs to be removed.'

Now Phil is a Someone Like Me volunteer, ready to offer support to anyone in his position.

'It really helped me so it was obvious I would want to pay that back.'

Visit [breastcancernow.org/male](https://breastcancernow.org/male) for information and support for men with breast cancer.





## Your questions answered

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

**Q** I've been having difficulty sleeping recently. What can I do to get a good night's sleep?

**A** Talk to your treatment team or GP if you have ongoing difficulty sleeping. Sometimes, a short course of medication to help you sleep may be recommended. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) can help some people.

Avoid alcohol and caffeine at night, and create a calm environment by making your bedroom dark, cool and comfortable.

Find ways to quieten your mind in the 30 minutes before going to bed. You could try reading, listening to music or having a milky drink. Relaxation techniques, such as meditation and mindfulness, can help.

If worrying thoughts keep you awake, have a pen and paper by the bed and write them down.

Finally, regular exercise during the day, not too late at night, can also help you sleep.

**Q** Can I have HRT if I've had treatment for breast cancer?

**A** While vaginal HRT may be safe for some women, other forms of HRT are not usually recommended after a diagnosis of breast cancer. This is because it's thought hormones can increase the risk of the cancer coming back.

It's not fully understood why HRT increases the risk, but research suggests it's due to the higher levels of oestrogen. Some breast cancers use oestrogen to help them to grow.

If you have menopausal symptoms, speak to your treatment team. A referral to a specialist menopause clinic can be helpful.

Some doctors may consider HRT if all other treatments to control the symptoms haven't worked, and your quality of life is affected.

You can order a copy of our booklet **Menopausal symptoms and breast cancer** through our website or by calling our Helpline.



**Q** My family and friends live far away, and I've felt really isolated since my breast cancer diagnosis. What can I do?

**A** Being diagnosed with cancer and not having family and friends close to hand can be difficult.

You could ask your family and friends about putting in some regular times for phone calls, video messaging or visits. You might want to ask your breast care nurse or GP about local support. Many areas have clubs, such as walking groups.

Breast Cancer Now has a range of services to help you feel less alone. This includes our free and confidential Helpline.

Our Someone Like Me service can put you in touch with someone else who has had a similar diagnosis and treatment.

Our online Forum is a supportive place and offers the opportunity to connect with others. You can also find tips on coping emotionally in our booklet **Diagnosed with breast cancer: what now?**

**Q** I have secondary breast cancer and saw the news about a new treatment called Trodelvy. Can I have it?

**A** Trodelvy, also known as sacituzumab govitecan, is a targeted therapy used to treat triple negative secondary breast cancer.

Trodelvy is made up of two parts. The targeted drug sacituzumab finds and attach itself to cancer cells. It then delivers a chemotherapy drug called SN-38 directly into the cancer cells to destroy them.

Trodelvy has been approved for use on the NHS. It can be given to people with triple negative breast cancer that has either spread to another part of the body (secondary breast cancer) or cannot be removed by surgery. It's suitable if you have already had two or more chemotherapy treatments for triple negative breast cancer. This must include at least one for secondary breast cancer or breast cancer that cannot be removed by surgery.

Your treatment team can tell you if Trodelvy is an option for you.



## ASK US

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

# Six simple exercises to build strength

The thought of picking up weights or heading to a gym might feel overwhelming, but you can strengthen your muscles with some simple exercises from the comfort of your home. Megan Stansfield explains more.

## Exercise and secondary breast cancer

Ongoing treatment and side effects can make the thought of exercise overwhelming if you have secondary breast cancer. However, exercise can be very beneficial and you can make adjustments depending on how you feel. Physical activity can help increase your appetite, improve fatigue, give you more energy, help you sleep better and improve your overall wellbeing and quality of life.

It may help to plan exercise around the time of day you have the most energy and build smaller exercises into your daily routine.

Rebuilding muscle during or after breast cancer treatment has several benefits, from helping improve balance and increasing bone strength to making daily jobs – like carrying shopping or walking up stairs – easier.

‘Muscle strength and endurance exercises are important to reduce the side effects of breast cancer treatment,’ says Breast Care Physiotherapist Sophie Barltrop. ‘Evidence suggests that improving muscle strength is strongly linked to improvements in fatigue.’

## How does it work?

Muscle-strengthening exercise makes your muscles work harder by adding weight or resistance to the movement.

Good examples of muscle-strengthening activities include:

- Walking up a hill or stairs
- Household jobs such as heavy gardening, hoovering or carrying shopping
- Pilates
- Cycling

The type of activity that’s right for you will depend on your fitness levels, any side effects of treatment you’re dealing with or other health issues you might have.

It’s important to talk to your treatment team before starting any new exercise.

## Tips for getting started

These tips may help you feel more confident in starting or getting back to exercise.

### 1. Remember, everyone is different

Try not to compare yourself to others, and exercise at your own pace and ability. Start slowly and gradually build up the amount you do.

### 2. Use support

If you find standing difficult or struggle with dizziness, exercise with the support of a sturdy chair or surfaces around your home such as walls and floors. Choose a stable chair that doesn’t have wheels and won’t slip.

### 3. Plan ahead

It may help to plan exercise around your treatment and side effects, or on days where you have more energy.

### 4. Join a group or use an app

Exercising with other people may help motivate you and can be a great way to meet new friends. Or try exercise support app Her Spirit. Regardless of your ability, location or stage of life, Her Spirit has something for everyone.



# Muscle-strengthening exercises you can do at home

Repeating these exercises 5 to 10 times, twice a week, will help you to build strength. You can use a sturdy chair for support. Take regular breaks and stop any exercise that causes you pain or discomfort.

If you have lasting pain and stiffness after breast cancer surgery speak to your treatment team. They may refer you to a physiotherapist.



## 1. Calf raises

Stand with your legs shoulder-width apart. Slowly raise your ankles off the ground and then return to the ground.



## 2. Leg extension

Stand with your legs shoulder-width apart. Lift one leg off the ground behind you. Repeat on the other leg.



## 3. Side leg raises

Stand with your legs shoulder-width apart. Lift one leg off the ground out to the side of you. Repeat on the other leg.



## 4. Bicep curls

Stand with your legs shoulder-width apart. Tuck your elbows into the sides of your body for support. Hold a weight (2kg or a filled water bottle) with your wrists facing up. Slowly bring your hands up to your shoulders and back down again.



## 5. Squats

Stand with your legs shoulder-width apart. Slowly bend your knees and push your bottom out to a point you feel comfortable with and then stand back up. Keep your back straight and make sure your knees don't go further forward than your feet.



## 6. Wall press

Stand with your hands against a flat wall, your hands should be at shoulder height. Slowly lower your body weight towards the wall then back to your starting position.

# THREE EXCITING NEW BREAST CANCER RESEARCH PROJECTS

**Research Communications Officer Edd Jones highlights three upcoming research projects and explains how each is helping us better understand and treat breast cancer.**

**A**t Breast Cancer Now, we're excited about the new research projects we're funding. For the first time since the Covid-19 pandemic, we'll be funding 11 new projects, all striving to answer the biggest questions in breast cancer research.

This new research will bring us closer to the day when everyone with breast cancer lives and lives well.

### **Understanding the impact of Covid-19**

Professor Anna Gavin is working to understand how breast cancer services have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Although we don't know the full impact on cancer services and patients, it has become clear that the Covid-19 pandemic

has disrupted breast cancer treatment and screening.

Breast Cancer Now is supporting Anna and her team at Queen's University Belfast to gather information from patients in Northern Ireland who were diagnosed during the pandemic.

They are comparing how these people were diagnosed and treated to patients diagnosed before the pandemic, to try and identify where services were affected and assess where improvements can be made.

Importantly, the data collected in this project could help us understand how the pandemic

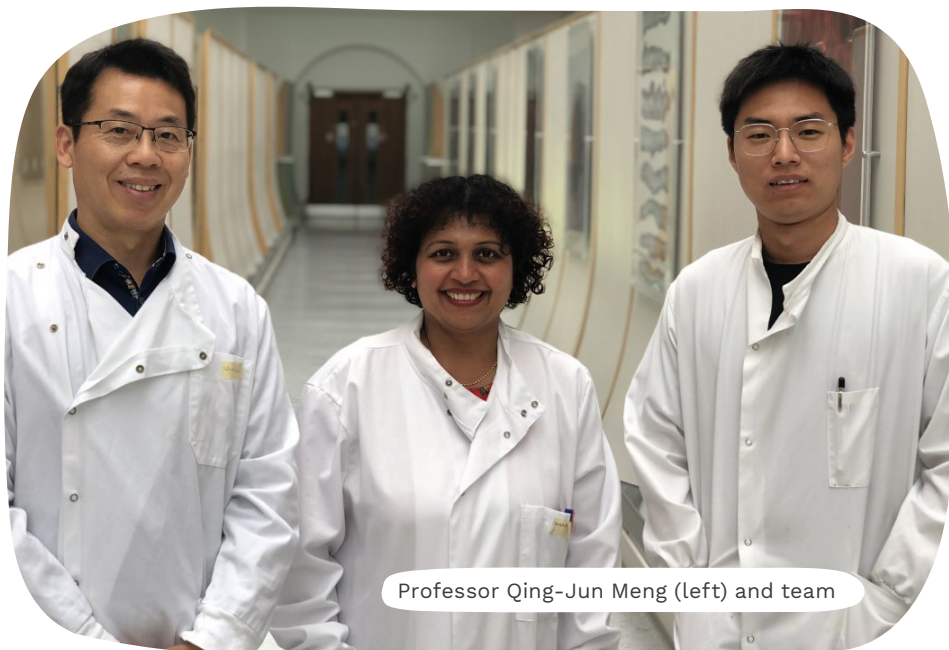
has affected patient survival. This information could help develop improvements for the care of breast cancer patients in areas such as screening, diagnosis and treatment, not only in Northern Ireland but in other countries as well.

### **Developing a vaccine treatment**

Also at Queen's University Belfast, Dr Niamh Buckley and her team are investigating whether a vaccine based on the Pfizer and Moderna Covid-19 vaccines could be used to treat triple negative breast cancer.







Professor Qing-Jun Meng (left) and team



This is just a taste of some of the exciting new projects that Breast Cancer Now is funding. To find out more about the breast cancer research we support, visit [breastcancernow.org/research](https://breastcancernow.org/research)

The treatment aims to stimulate the immune system to recognise and fight the cancer with minimal side effects.

Triple negative breast cancer makes up around 15% of breast cancers and can be more aggressive than other forms of the disease. There are also currently limited targeted treatments available for triple

negative breast cancer.

The treatment is targeting a protein called p53. Almost 90% of triple negative breast cancers contain an abnormally large amount of this protein compared to healthy cells. And there is a simple test to check if a tumour has a lot of p53, which means doctors could easily test who is most likely to benefit from the treatment.

The researchers are using cell samples donated by patients to determine what part of p53 the vaccine should target and are testing the immune response to this treatment. They are also looking to test the effectiveness of this treatment on its own and in combination with chemotherapy against tumours in mice.

If successful, this exciting new avenue could not only provide a new treatment for primary breast cancer but could also help prevent breast cancer from returning.

### Exploring the biological clock

Professor Qing-Jun Meng, from the University of Manchester, is working to understand how the

body's internal biological clock is involved in the development and progression of breast cancer. Our body clock plays a vital role, in our bodies and cells, as it helps time important processes like growth and repair to a 24-hour day.

In some cancer cells, this inner clock can become disrupted, but we're not yet fully sure what effects this has.

Qing-Jun and his team are investigating why oestrogen receptor positive and HER2 negative breast cancers have a normal working inner clock but HER2 positive breast cancers don't.

To answer this question, they are studying samples donated by breast cancer patients and using artificial intelligence to reveal how the inner clock is involved in breast cancer.

The researchers are also searching for clues as to whether the timing of existing treatments can make them more effective, or whether interfering with the inner biological clock can lead to the development of new treatments.

**Our life-changing research couldn't happen without the incredible researchers working hard in our labs.**

This Christmas would you consider making a donation which could go towards the next big discovery, or innovative project? You'll also have the opportunity to leave a festive message for our researchers to help spread the Christmas cheer in the labs over the festive period.

Visit [breastcancernow.org/researchstars](https://breastcancernow.org/researchstars) to donate and send a virtual message.

# Enduring love



Rebecca and her running crew

**Rebecca Brennan embarked on an epic running challenge to enter the record books while raising money in memory of her mum.**

On 1 August 2021, I was due to start the Cape Wrath Ultra in Scotland.

Instead, I held my mum's hand as she passed away after two-and-a-half years of living with secondary breast cancer.

We were all left with a giant hole in our heart.

## On the trail

I'm 46 and an average runner. I ran my first 10k in 2001 and came second to last.

Twenty years on, running is my life.

After losing my mum I couldn't get the Cape Wrath Trail out of my mind.

It's about 260 miles long, from

Fort William to the lighthouse at Cape Wrath, the most north-westerly point in mainland Britain.

After talking to my coach – ultra-runner Nicky Spinks, who has had breast cancer herself – we decided I would do my own race and aim to get the Fastest Known Time (FKT) on the course.

I would also raise money for Breast Cancer Now in my mum's memory.

## Eventful

At 5am on 10 May 2022, I was ready to start my Cape Wrath FKT attempt with my crew: Dan, Ash and Roger, all hugely successful runners.

I set off with Dan for the first section, 23 miles of trail and one mountain pass to Glenfinnan.

After a sandwich and change of socks, I was off again with Ash for an eventful 15-hours of running through the night.

The weather was getting worse, the terrain more mountainous.

At 3am we were stuck between two rivers in spate, unable to cross without risking our lives.

After an hour of looking for a crossing point, we managed to wade across the slowest part of the river at waist height.

Back at the van at 5am and after an hour of sleep, Dan and I were off again.

## To the lighthouse

This was the routine for the next five days: run, change socks, food, maybe a nap but keep moving forward.

I never thought I would get to Cape Wrath Lighthouse; but I

also never thought I wouldn't get there.

I finished the Cape Wrath Trail with Roger at midday on Sunday 15 May, clocking a time of 5 days, 5 hours and 36 minutes, 261 miles and over 12,000m of ascent.

Not only am I the Fastest Known Female to run the trail, but I've also raised over £13,000 for Breast Cancer Now.

My biggest learning is: surround yourself with good friends who believe in you (sometimes more than you believe in yourself) and it's amazing what we can achieve together.

Every gift is special to us, none more so than a gift in memory of a loved one. Giving in memory of a loved one is a wonderful way to honour and celebrate their memory and support people affected by breast cancer.

Visit [breastcancernow.org/in-memory](https://breastcancernow.org/in-memory)



Rebecca's mum, Dorothy





# GET ACTIVE WITH BREAST CANCER NOW

**Calling all swimmers, cyclists, runners and hikers. Take on a challenge with us and we'll be with you every step of the way.**

We have events to suit every fitness level, so whether you're a Sunday stroller or a keen cyclist we'd love you to join us.

## **SIGN UP TODAY TO GET:**

- ✓ Expert support from our experienced Events Team
- ✓ Your own Breast Cancer Now top to help you stand out from the crowd

**Sign up today** [breastcancernow.org/challenge\\_yourself](https://breastcancernow.org/challenge_yourself)

# CATHERINE'S HERE

**BREAST  
CANCER  
NOW** The research &  
support charity

**TO LISTEN,  
WHATEVER  
YOU'RE GOING  
THROUGH.**



**LET'S TALK MORE OPENLY ABOUT  
BREAST CANCER. HOWEVER YOU'RE  
EXPERIENCING IT, WE'RE HERE.**

*Catherine, Breast Cancer Now  
Helpline Nurse*

Breast Cancer Now is a charity registered in England and Wales (1160558), Scotland (SC045584) and the Isle of Man (1200).

# VITA

**Three ways to subscribe to Vita magazine**

1. Visit [breastcancernow.org/vita](https://breastcancernow.org/vita)
2. Email [vita@breastcancernow.org](mailto:vita@breastcancernow.org)
3. Fill in this form and send it to the address below

☐ I'd like to receive Vita magazine twice a year

Name

Address

Postcode

**Breast Cancer Now, Freepost RTSC-SJTC-RAKY, Fifth Floor, Ibex House, 42-47 Minories, London EC3N 1DY**

If you already hear from us, we'll continue to contact you in the same way. From time to time, we may contact you by post to keep you updated on our work and ways you can help. You can change the way you hear from us at any time by emailing us at [hello@breastcancernow.org](mailto:hello@breastcancernow.org), calling us on 0333 20 70 300 or writing to us at the address above.

To help us work more efficiently, we may analyse your information to make sure you receive the most relevant communications. This may include using publicly available information. You can ask us to stop this at any time, by contacting us using the above contact details. You can read more about how we will use your information on our website at [breastcancernow.org/privacy](https://breastcancernow.org/privacy), or contact us if you'd like a paper copy.