

Survivorship Care at the Brown Cancer Center

We are all survivors from day one and beyond

How can I Help Myself as a Breast Cancer Survivor?

Screening.

As a breast cancer survivor, it's important to know what your screening guidelines are. Ask your doctor when your next mammogram is due and if you are a candidate for additional screening, such as a breast MRI or a diagnostic mammogram. Self-breast exams remain an important tool that women should utilize every month. Even if you elected for a double mastectomy, it's still important to perform a self-breast or chest wall exam every month and know what worrisome signs or symptoms you should report to your doctor. Some examples could include a new lump, skin changes or a rash on the chest or breast area.

Take your medication.

Many women will be prescribed an anti-estrogen pill that they take on a daily basis for 5-10 years. Some studies indicate that less than 50% of women actually take these medicines as prescribed. In many ways, this anti-estrogen pill is the most important part of your treatment. If you are struggling with side effects from the medication or having difficulty affording the prescription, please ask your doctor for assistance, we are here to help you.

Live an active and healthy lifestyle.

Exercise and a healthy diet will benefit breast cancer survivors in endless ways. Both are proven to improve fatigue, increase energy levels, reduce hot flashes, and improve depression and anxiety symptoms. Many studies also link a healthy weight and regular exercise to reduced rates of breast cancer relapse. The American Cancer Society recommends a diet rich in vegetables, fruit and whole grains. Avoid processed food (anything that comes in a package such as frozen microwave meals, canned soup, packaged snacks). Great protein sources include chicken, turkey, fish, nuts, quinoa and legumes (beans). Alcohol intake should also be limited. No more than one alcoholic beverage per day is recommended for breast cancer survivors. Women should exercise 30 minutes/day, five days/week with moderate intensity. This means becoming a little short of breath and sweaty during your exercise.

Maintain a good relationship with your primary care provider.

During their breast cancer treatment, many women lean on their oncologist and may not see their primary care physician often or at all during their treatment. It's important after treatment is completed to visit with your primary care physician and let them know what treatment you have received. Primary care physicians are an integral piece of your care and it is important to have their input and assessment during your oncology follow up visits.

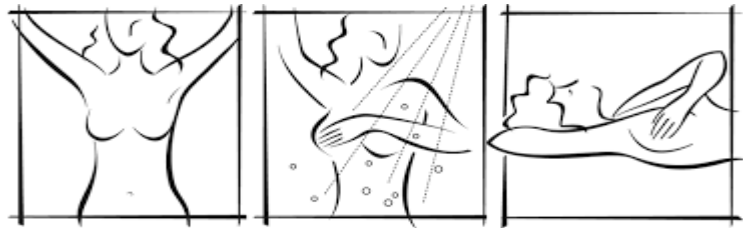
- Whitney Pitman, APRN, AOCNP

I don't know what I'm feeling for?

Adult women of all ages are encouraged to perform monthly, self-breast exams. Often we hear we report that they do not know what they are feeling for or they could not feel their previous cancer, so they rely on mammograms. A report from Johns Hopkins Medical Center reports that up to 40% of breast cancers are detected by women who feel a lump. Mammograms are excellent screening tools, but regular self-breast exams will help you become familiar with your breast anatomy so you can alert your healthcare professional about any changes.

So how do I perform a self-breast exam?

In the shower or lying down are great places to start. Raise your arm up over your head and using the opposite hand, move the pads of your fingers in a circular motion over the breast tissue using light, medium and firm pressure. You want to include the armpit area as well because breast tissue expands up to this region. Do not forget to feel the nipple area and also gently squeeze the nipple area and look for any discharge. Visually inspect your breasts and look for any dimpling, changes in the nipples or swelling. Repeat this process once a month during the same time each month.



H.E.R. Program Offers Choices and Hope for Young Women with Breast Cancer



Breast cancer in young women is biologically different than breast cancer diagnosed at an older age. Young women facing breast cancer are also presented with many additional challenges, such as fertility, effects of their cancer treatment on young children, professional growth and intimacy issues. The H.E.R. program at the Brown Cancer was designed to help young breast cancer survivors address these issues while receiving the best and most up to date cancer care. H.E.R. stands for **H**ope for cure, **E**mpowerment of choice in therapy and **R**estoration after cancer treatment. Women age 45 or younger are automatically enrolled into the program. If you are interested in the H.E.R. program, call 502-562-HOPE or ask your doctor.

Liver Cancer Awareness Month

October is also liver cancer awareness month. More than 40,000 new cases of liver cancer will be diagnosed in the US this year (American Cancer Society, Cancer Facts & Figures, 2017). Risk factors for liver cancer include chronic infection with Hepatitis B or C, heavy alcohol consumption, diabetes, obesity and smoking. One of the treatment options for liver cancer includes surgery. A partial hepatectomy can remove part of the liver affected by cancer. Other treatment options include tumor ablation, embolization (blocking the blood supply to the tumor), liver transplant and chemotherapy.

Preventing liver cancer involves avoiding the most common causes. Hepatitis infection is the most common cause. There is a Hepatitis B vaccine available and the CDC recommends that all children and high risk adults get vaccinated. There is no vaccine for Hepatitis C. The CDC does recommend that adults born between 1945-1965 get tested for Hepatitis C. It is also recommended that adults who have a history of IV drug abuse, HIV, long-term hemodialysis use or history of a blood transfusion prior to 1992 be tested. If you have any questions about your liver cancer risk, please ask your doctor.