

# Follow-up after Breast Cancer

## I'm done with treatment. What happens now?

Breast cancer survivors have an increased risk of getting a new breast cancer compared to those who have never had breast cancer. That is why it is important to get the follow-up care your doctor recommends. With proper follow-up, your doctor can keep track of how you are doing. This includes checking for and treating side effects. Follow-up care can also help ensure any recurrence of breast cancer can be found early when treatment is most effective.

Your primary care doctor, oncologist or surgeon can help plan your follow-up care.



## Follow-up care guidelines

The National Comprehensive Cancer Network guidelines for follow-up of breast cancer treatment:

1. Have a mammogram every 12 months. (For women treated with lumpectomy, have a mammogram six to 12 months after radiation therapy ends, then every 12 months).
2. Have a physical exam by a health care provider every four to six months for five years, then every 12 months.
3. Have a pelvic exam every 12 months if taking tamoxifen and have not had the uterus removed (have not had a hysterectomy).
4. Have regular bone density tests if you have a higher risk of osteoporosis (due to age or treatment, for example).
5. Take medications as prescribed by your doctor.
6. Maintain an active lifestyle and healthy body weight. Your body mass index (BMI) should be between 20 and 25. BMI is a measure used to estimate body fat. It takes into account a person's height and weight.

## Symptoms that you should report to your doctor

- Any changes in the breast(s) or chest area, pain, loss of appetite or weight, changes in menstrual periods, unusual vaginal bleeding or blurred vision.
- Dizziness, coughing that does not go away, hoarseness, shortness of breath, headaches, backaches, bone pain or digestive problems that are unusual or that do not go away.

Your doctor will examine you and find out the nature of the symptoms and discuss what to do next.

## After treatment

For some people, completing their treatment signals a new start in life. At the same time, it can also feel like the end of constant support and care. When you reach this point, there are many new issues to think about. Here are a few of the most common ones:

### How will I know if the cancer returns?

Before you complete your cancer treatments, set up follow-up visits with your doctor. Regular physical exams and mammograms can help find a recurrence or a new breast cancer. Be aware of new changes in your breasts. Report them to your doctor.

### Am I going to feel sick from now on?

No. When you finish treatment, you may still be tired. Do not fight that — your body needs rest. If you are able, being physically active can help speed the recovery process after treatment.

Side effects like nausea and hair loss should go away after treatment ends. If nausea or other side effects last, tell your doctor.

### Should I get back to my usual routine?

Getting back to all the things you used to do, even if it takes some time, will help you feel better. Adopt a healthy lifestyle that includes physical activity, a healthy diet and regular screening tests (such as bone-density tests and pelvic exams). This will help maintain your health. It may also give you peace of mind.

### Will it ever be over?

Believe it or not, there may come a day when you no longer worry about cancer and live your life without fear. It is normal to have some anxiety. This should lessen over time. You can always get support from other breast cancer survivors who are in the same place as you are now.

There are often support groups for people at specific stages of illness or recovery. You may also find self-help groups that are run by breast cancer survivors. These groups can be an important source of information and support.

## Follow-up tests

Depending on the symptoms, blood tests (including tumor marker tests) and imaging tests (including bone scans, CT scans, PET scans and chest X-rays) may be used to check for metastases. Using these tests to check for early metastases in people with no symptoms of metastases does not increase survival.

For people with no symptoms of metastases, blood and imaging tests (other than mammography) are not a standard part of follow-up care.

## Resources

Susan G. Komen®  
1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636)  
[www.komen.org](http://www.komen.org)

American Cancer Society's Reach to Recovery Program  
1-800-ACS-2345  
[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

American Society of Clinical Oncology  
1-888-282-2552  
[www.asco.org](http://www.asco.org)

Living Beyond Breast Cancer  
1-888-753-5222  
[www.lbbc.org](http://www.lbbc.org)

National Comprehensive Cancer Network  
1-866-788-NCCN  
[www.nccn.org](http://www.nccn.org)

### Related fact sheets in this series:

- Breast Cancer Detection
- Getting the Support You Need
- Healthy Living
- If Breast Cancer Returns
- Life After Breast Cancer Treatment
- Lymphedema

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