

Many women say facing cancer the first time was one of the hardest things they have ever had to do. There were many new things to learn and many tests to go through. When breast cancer returns (called a recurrence), a woman may know what to expect. But, that does not mean it is any easier.

Women who have a recurrence of breast cancer often feel angry and afraid. It does not seem fair that a disease they fought so hard to get rid of would come back. Some women even second-guess the treatment choices they made. They may wonder if they have the strength to go through it all again. If you have had these thoughts, you are not alone. But, you must believe that you made the right decisions. There is likely nothing more you could have done. It may be helpful to find a support group for women who have had a recurrence of breast cancer.

Never give up hope. You and your doctor will make a plan to treat your cancer.

While it may be hard at first, continue to live your life as you want. Find the energy to do the things that make you happy. Talk to others about how they can help you live well each day.

### **Types of recurrence**

Breast cancer can recur at the original site (called recurrence or local recurrence). It can also spread to other parts of the body (called metastasis or distant recurrence).



### **Facts about recurrence**

- Many recurrences are limited to the breast and can be removed by surgery.
- Local recurrence is usually found during a mammogram or through a physical exam.
- Metastasis is usually found when symptoms are reported during follow-up office visits.

Your cancer is less likely to recur if:

- You had no or few cancerous lymph nodes found during surgery.
- Your breast cancer was found early and was small.
- You had adjuvant therapy (chemotherapy and/or hormone therapy) along with surgery.

## A new treatment plan

### Learn as much as you can

Find out as much as you can about where your breast cancer has recurred. The location and characteristics of the tumor may be different from your original breast cancer. Learning about your cancer will help you consider your treatment options.

### Don't face this alone

These are difficult, emotional choices to face. A patient advocate or co-survivor (family or friend) is someone who will support you and help you weigh your options. Ask them to help take notes at doctor appointments, gather medical records and make sure you understand your treatment options. You do not have to face this alone.

### Pick your medical team

You may want to use the same medical team you had before. Or you may want to ask different doctors to join your team. Even if your medical team is the same as before, get a second opinion. Other doctors may see things another way and can provide you with different information.

### Choose your treatment goal

The location and extent of the recurrence will affect your treatment goals. If you have a local recurrence, your treatment will aim to get rid of the cancer with some combination of surgery, radiation (if it was not part of initial treatment), chemotherapy, targeted therapy and hormone therapy.

If metastasis is present, tests are done to see which organs are involved and the characteristics of the tumor. Talk to your doctor about treatment goals and options.

**Second primary tumor** — A second primary breast tumor is not considered a recurrence. It is different from the original cancer in its location and possibly in its characteristics.



## Resources

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

American Cancer Society  
1-800-ACS-2345  
[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

National Cancer Institute  
1-800-4-CANCER  
[www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

### Related fact sheets in this series:

- End-of-life Care
- Getting the Support You Need
- Metastatic Breast Cancer
- Research on Breast Cancer Treatment
- Treatment Choices — An Overview

The above list of resources is only a suggested resource and is not a complete listing of breast cancer materials or information. The information contained herein is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or to replace the services of a medical professional. Komen does not endorse, recommend or make any warranties or representations regarding the accuracy, completeness, timeliness, quality or non-infringement of any of the materials, products or information provided by the organizations referenced herein.