

# Coping with Male Breast Cancer



If you're a man with breast cancer, you may feel a variety of physical and emotional reactions to having cancer and going through treatment.

No matter what emotions arise, coping strategies can help. Here's how to get started.

Gender words are used here to talk about anatomy and health risk. Please use this information in a way that works best for you and your provider as you talk about your care.

## Get the facts

First, it's important to have all the information you need to know about your cancer. Ask your healthcare provider questions about your cancer, what treatment will be like, and what the side effects may be. You can also ask your healthcare team if they have advice on how to cope.

Know that cancer and its treatment can cause physical side effects that can be hard to handle at times. Common physical side effects include:

- Extreme tiredness (fatigue)
- Pain
- Nausea or vomiting
- Hair loss
- Changes in weight and appetite
- Skin rashes or irritation
- Scars and body changes from surgery
- Changes in body image or how you view yourself

You may also have a wide range of feelings, often many at the same time. Some difficult emotions you may have are:

- Anger
- Grief
- Fear
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Stress
- Loneliness

But it's not all negative. People also have positive emotions during cancer treatment. You may feel:

- Hopeful about your treatment
- A new sense of gratitude for being alive
- A renewed faith in your spiritual life

- Closeness with and appreciation for friends, family, and community
- A greater focus on what's most important

It's completely normal to feel any and all these emotions. You may also cycle through these emotions throughout the day, week, or year.

The following suggestions can help you cope with these reactions to cancer.

## Maintain a healthy lifestyle

Do your best to keep up with healthy habits during this time or develop new ones. Boost your mind and body by:

- **Keeping a daily routine.** Many find it grounding to stick to a daily routine. Your schedule may include waking up, having breakfast, exercising, seeing family and friends, spending time in nature, working, or doing whatever feels significant to you.
- **Eating well.** Having regular healthy meals can keep your body and energy strong. Try to eat a mixture of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, healthy fats, and protein. Some people lose their appetites in response to stress, cancer, or their treatments. Let your care team know if you're finding it hard to eat. They have tools, medicines, and experts who can help you get the nutrients you need.
- **Exercising.** About 30 minutes of moderate exercise per day can go a long way for both mental and physical well-being. A daily walk, a relaxing yoga class, or a bike ride are all great options. Ask your healthcare team what exercises are safe for you before starting a new activity.
- **Sleeping.** Getting enough rest and sleep are vital for the body and mind to stay healthy. Aim for at least 7 hours of sleep per night. If that's not possible, short daytime naps can also help keep you rested. Being anxious or overwhelmed can make sleeping difficult, so tell your provider of any sleep issues.
- **Spending time with friends and family.** Socializing can lower stress, boost your immune system, and help to prevent depression. Build time into your schedule for your loved ones.

## Accept help from friends and family

Along with helping you with everyday tasks, support from your inner circle can help prevent loneliness. Ask the people in your life to help you:

- Make meals or organize a meal train
- Run errands
- Take you to appointments
- Do your shopping
- Help with child or pet care
- Lend a hand with household chores like cleaning, dishes, and laundry

## Practice relaxing

When you're stressed or overwhelmed, it's easy to forget to make time for the relaxing activities you enjoy. It's a good idea to schedule time for them to get a much-needed break from treatment and appointments. Some ideas for relaxation include:

- **Quiet activities you can do on your own.** Try reading a book, going for a walk, or listening to music. Bonus points if it's outdoors. Exposure to sunlight and fresh air can help lift your mood.

- **Write in a journal.** Jotting down your thoughts, feelings, and observations has been shown to decrease stress and improve overall well-being.
- **Practice a creative hobby.** Artistic activities like drawing, painting, or playing an instrument can be relaxing, inspiring, and offer a sense of accomplishment.
- **Meditation.** There are many ways to meditate, whether sitting, walking, lying down, or even washing the dishes. Meditation can help relax you, sharpen your focus, and create a sense of calm throughout your day.
- **Relaxed or deep breathing.** You can find videos or audio clips to guide you in deep, slow, rhythmic breathing. This can relax both body and mind.
- **Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR).** This technique helps you tense and release your muscles from your toes to your head. You can find guided PMR audio sessions and videos online or with a therapist.
- **Yoga.** Yoga releases tension and gently strengthens the body. It can also help focus and relax the mind, deepen your breathing, and reduce fatigue, pain, and trouble sleeping.
- **Prayer or other religious practices.** If you have a spiritual belief, this may be a good time to practice it. Try praying, reading spiritual texts, and connecting with your spiritual or religious community.

## Share with others

It can be hard for people who haven't had cancer to understand how you're feeling. It may help to talk to people who have been in your situation.

You can:

- **Reach out to friends and family.** Connect with cancer survivors or people who have overcome serious illnesses. They can share their experiences, like what worked or didn't work for them. It can also make you feel better just to talk or be with someone who understands what you're going through.
- **Join a cancer support group.** These groups meet in person and online. Find a support group through your healthcare team or through an internet search. You could join:
  - Peer-led groups run by group members
  - Professional-led support groups led by a licensed counselor, social worker, or psychologist
  - Informational support groups led by a professional to give expert information and insights on cancer

## Work with a mental health professional

Seeing a mental health professional can be very helpful and sometimes necessary. When depression, anxiety, or other mental health concerns don't get better with coping skills, these experts can offer you tools specific to you and your situation. If needed, they can suggest or prescribe medicine.

You might work with social workers, licensed counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists. Ask your healthcare provider or cancer treatment center for referrals.

Everyone's reactions to having and treating cancer are different. And each person's way of coping will be different, too. Take time to discover which coping strategies work best for you, so you can feel as supported as possible.

© 2000-2027 The StayWell Company, LLC. All rights reserved. This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Always follow your healthcare professional's instructions.  
This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Always follow your Healthcare professional's instructions. Copyright Krames LLC.