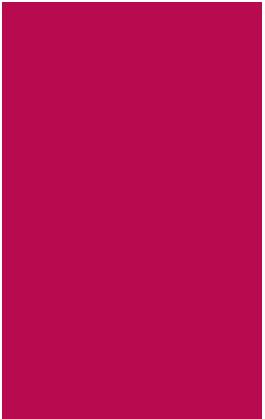
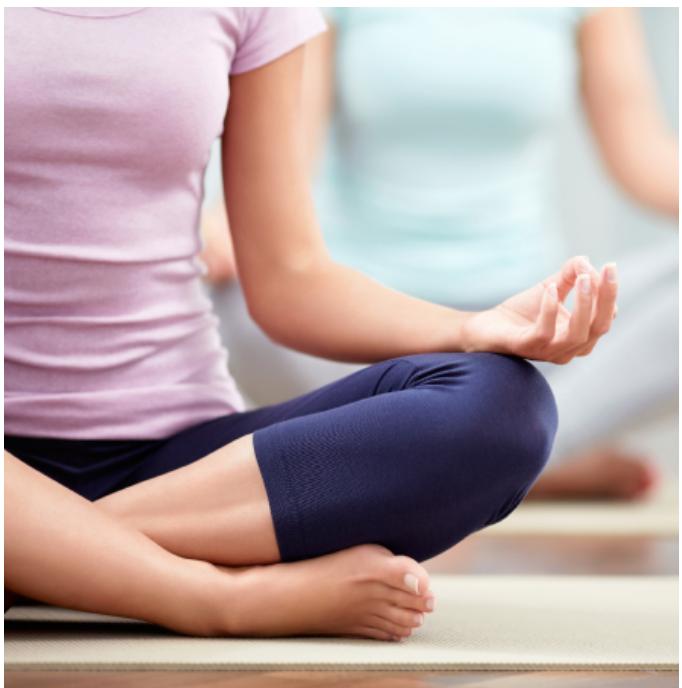




CPMC Health Psychology Program  
Notkin Family Breast Cancer Recovery Program  
3698 California Street  
San Francisco, CA 94118  
(415) 600-2717

## Breast Health Center Psychosocial Services for English Speaking Patients







# Contents

How Your Mind Can Help Your Body . . . . .	4
Psychological Adjustment to Breast Cancer . . . . .	5
Common Psychosocial Concerns . . . . .	6
Identifying Your Psychosocial Concerns . . . . .	7
<b>Types of Social Support . . . . .</b>	<b>8</b>
• Informational Support	
• Emotional Support	
• Practical / Instrumental Support	
• Companionship Support	
<b>How to Utilize Your Social Support System . . . . .</b>	<b>9</b>
• Being Proactive in Your Health	
• Available Resources	
<b>Living Well . . . . .</b>	<b>11</b>
• Seek Education and Ask Questions	
• Make Healthy Lifestyle Changes	
• Use Your Social Support System	
• Express Yourself	
• Make Time for Fun	
• Make Time for Self-Care	
• Adjust Your Thinking	
• Find Positive Gains of the Cancer Experience	
• Seek Professional Support	
<b>My Coping Resources . . . . .</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Benefits of Support Groups . . . . .</b>	<b>14</b>
• Meet other women who are undergoing similar experiences	
• Supportive environment	
• Education	
• Learn stress management and coping skills	



## How your mind can help your body

### Preparing to Successfully Navigate Through Your Journey

Receiving a diagnosis of breast cancer can be one of the most distressing events women ever experience.

The Breast Health Center's Health Psychology Team offers individual consultations to support you on this journey. Interpreters are available for all patients.

Meetings are free of charge & can be provided for patients, couples, and families. We can also assist you with referrals to other resources in the local area.

To schedule an appointment, please call:  
**415-600-2717 option 4**

## Navigation Guide

This navigation guide, developed by our Health Psychology Team provides important information to help you identify & manage the common challenges related to breast cancer treatment & diagnosis.

For questions about material presented in this guide or for more information, please schedule an appointment with a member of the Health Psychology team by calling 415-600-2717 option 4.

# Psychological Adjustment to Breast Cancer

Although breast cancer is a major stressor for any woman, there is great variability in psychological responses. Everyone is different, so the ways in which you react to a diagnosis of breast cancer is no exception. These different reactions can be grouped into 3 categories. Some reactions are *emotional*, which include feeling scared, sad, or angry. Other reactions are related to *thoughts*, which are the things you think or tell yourself ("I can't believe this is happening to me.") Finally, some reactions are *behavioral*, which have to do with how you act and behave (e.g., avoiding people or things, lashing out at other people, overeating).

EMOTIONS	THOUGHTS	BEHAVIORS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shocked</li><li>• Overwhelmed</li><li>• Numb</li><li>• Angry</li><li>• Sad</li><li>• Depressed</li><li>• Hopeless</li><li>• Lonely</li><li>• Grief</li><li>• Worried</li><li>• Anxious</li><li>• Scared</li><li>• Guilty</li><li>• Regretful</li><li>• Grateful</li><li>• Embarrassed</li><li>• Confused</li><li>• Vulnerable</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Denial</li><li>• Concerns related to body and appearance</li><li>• Self-Blame (thinking that you caused it)</li><li>• Awareness of stigma (negative beliefs and attitudes towards a particular group of people, such as breast cancer patients)</li><li>• Changes in personal values, beliefs, and expectations</li><li>• Thinking you are a "burden" to others</li><li>• Thinking about the worstcase-scenario</li><li>• Worrying about the future</li><li>• Fears of death</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Problems sleeping</li><li>• Changes in appetite</li><li>• Loss of energy</li><li>• Social isolation</li><li>• Avoidance (activities, appointments, people)</li><li>• Changes in normal routine</li><li>• Information seeking</li><li>• Increase in unhealthy coping methods (zoning out in front of the TV or computer for hours, excessive drinking, unhealthy eating, etc.)</li><li>• Anger outbursts</li><li>• Crying</li><li>• Talking or venting to other people</li></ul>

# Common Psychosocial Concerns

Receiving a diagnosis of breast cancer can be one of the most distressing and challenging experiences endured by women. Following diagnosis, it is common to feel as if you are encountering new and/or unexpected challenges related to your breast cancer. Psychosocial concerns are comprised of emotional, psychological, interpersonal, and environmental factors that you may likely experience at times throughout your breast cancer journey. These concerns often result in different reactions, influencing your emotions, thoughts, or behaviors.

## Examples of Common Psychosocial Concerns

INTERPERSONAL CONCERN	IDENTITY-RELATED ISSUES	COPING WITH TREATMENT	NAVIGATING THE JOURNEY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Impact on children</li><li>• Impact on significant other and/or loved ones</li><li>• Leaving others behind</li><li>• Navigating difficult conversations</li><li>• Dealing with the reactions of others</li><li>• Balancing multiple responsibilities or roles</li><li>• Interference with career</li><li>• Feeling different or isolated from others</li><li>• Disruption in major life-roles</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Body image and appearance</li><li>• Loss of bodily functioning or control</li><li>• Issues with sexuality</li><li>• Concerns about fertility</li><li>• Loss of femininity</li><li>• Premature menopause</li><li>• Impact on self-identity</li><li>• Diminished sense of well being</li><li>• Lack of meaning related to the diagnosis</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Coping with painful emotions</li><li>• Lack of coping resources or strategies</li><li>• Adjusting to the side effects of treatment</li><li>• Concern about ongoing monitoring (e.g., whom to call if a problem arises)</li><li>• Managing cognitive side effects (e.g., “chemo-brain”)</li><li>• Dealing with physical symptoms (e.g., fatigue, pain, loss of energy)</li><li>• Fears about the future</li><li>• Feelings of uncertainty</li><li>• Fears about premature death</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Beliefs related to cancer</li><li>• Decision-making about providers or treatment options</li><li>• Being proactive with one’s treatment</li><li>• Availability of resources or financial issues</li><li>• Making lifestyle and health changes</li><li>• Using one’s social support system</li><li>• Feeling as a burden to others</li><li>• Making health a priority</li><li>• Limited social support available</li></ul>

# Identifying Your Psychosocial Concerns

Now that you understand the different psychosocial concerns related to breast cancer diagnosis and treatment, it is helpful to identify the unique obstacles and challenges you face and how you respond to them. For example, your concerns related to the impact of your diagnosis on your children or loved ones can have an effect on your emotions (e.g., anxiety, guilt or fear), thoughts (e.g., thoughts of denial or worst-case scenario thinking), or behaviors (e.g., avoiding social support or loved ones). By identifying your psychosocial concerns and corresponding reactions, you can develop awareness about the impact they have on your sense of self and wellbeing, and develop strategies to better cope and manage distress.

**Directions:** In the table below, please list all of your psychosocial concerns and any corresponding emotions, thoughts, or behaviors that arise or you have noticed when encountered with these concerns. It may be helpful to refer to the “Examples of Psychosocial Concerns” table or the “Psychological Adjustment to Breast Cancer” worksheet listed on the previous pages when completing your table.

# Utilizing Your Social Support System

Having a social support system is an important aspect of overall wellness and is associated with many health benefits. Strong social support is known to improve the ability to cope with breast cancer, reduce emotional distress, enhance quality of life, and provides a buffer against stress.

However, many women may find it hard to ask members of their social support system for help or know how to utilize their social support during difficult times. It may also feel overwhelming when people try to lend you support, but it does not match what you need at that moment. In addition, you may find yourself needing specific types of social support from certain individuals, and the type and/or amount of social support you need may change as you go through treatment.

## Types of Social Support

### Informational Support:

This type of support provides you with information related to your breast cancer to help you problem-solve, and includes gathering and sharing information, advice-giving, and guidance. You might receive informational support from your medical team, online resources, or other women with breast cancer.

### Emotional Support:

This type of support offers you empathy, trust, warmth, and nurturance, and considers your emotional wellness. These individuals listen to your concerns or challenges, allow you to express your feelings and emotions, provide you with physical comfort (e.g., hugs), are present with you in the moment, or are there for you as a confidant.

### Practical / Instrumental Support:

This type of support refers to the concrete and direct ways that individuals may offer you support:

- assisting with specific tasks or responsibilities
- helping with household chores
- providing transportation to appointments
- attending medical appointments to take notes.

### Companionship Support:

This type of support provides you with a sense of social belonging and engages with you in shared social or self-care activities. These individuals help you feel connected and are willing to join you in different activities, including going for a walk, taking a yoga class, or watching a movie together.

Understanding the different types of social support you need at any given time will help you get your needs met efficiently and effectively.



## How to Utilize Your Social Support System

Begin with making a list of people in your life that would be available to offer you support. Your list may include family, significant other, children, friends, co-workers, neighbors, or members from your community.

Take a moment for self-reflection and think about what you need to feel supported and empowered on your journey. Some helpful questions to ask yourself include the following:

- Am I comfortable with asking the people on my list for support?
- What do I need from my support system?
- What would be most helpful?
- What areas, activities, or responsibilities do I need the most support with?
- What type of support am I most comfortable with receiving?
- What support might I need in both the short-term and long-term?
- Who would be best to offer good informational support? Emotional support?
- Instrumental/practical support? Companionship support?

After reflecting on your needs, write down what you would specifically need from EVERY person on your list. For example, a significant other or family member could provide you with emotional support, a neighbor might be best with offering instrumental/practical support (e.g., helping you with household chores), and a friend or co-worker could provide companionship support (e.g., engaging in self-care activities).

The next step is to tell the people in your life EXACTLY what they can do to support you. Remember to be specific, clear, and concrete! This is an opportunity to maximize your support with regard to your own needs, as well as to help members of your support system clearly understand how they can have a caring role in your journey.

One recommendation is to consider asking someone in your life to do the delegating for you. This person could connect with members of your support system (e.g., via email or phone contact) and let them know what you need, which could lessen the burden of having to manage this task as well as minimize any discomfort you might feel with having to ask yourself.

If your support were to potentially be limited due to unseen factors, what else could you do to acquire or ensure you are receiving support? This might include joining a support group, participating in a wellness class, or requesting a consultation with Health Psychology.



## Being Proactive in Your Health

Being proactive in your care promotes wellness and improves your sense of control and comfort throughout treatment. By working with your treatment team and including yourself in the process as much as possible (e.g., asking questions or discussing options), you may feel empowered about your health and treatment, supported by your team, and more confident.

- Make sure your physical health and psychological and emotional health is included in your healthcare
- Ask your treatment team for referrals or recommendations, as needed
- Become a better self-advocate (e.g., requesting additional resources to facilitate coping)
- Have open and honest communication with your treatment team
- Understand your diagnosis and medications and staying informed
- Keep a list of questions, concerns, or changes in symptoms to discuss at your next appointment
- Maintain a copy of your own health records (e.g., list of medications, copies of reports)
- Talk to other women who may share your diagnosis or similar experiences
- Live a balanced lifestyle that fosters wellness
- Seek additional social or emotional support
- Learn adaptive ways to cope with painful emotions

## Available Resources

In addition, the Breast Health Center at CPMC offers various patient resources to assist you in your journey with breast cancer. A copy of these resources can be found in your patient folder.

- Health Psychology Consultations
- Exercise and Yoga Classes
- Lymphedema Services
- Massage
- Meditation and Guided Imagery
- Resources for Mothers and Children
- Nutrition Consultations
- Patient Classes / Lectures
- Post-Surgery Services
- Support Resources
- Treatment-Related Classes
- Wigs and Scarves

# Living Well

The ways in which you cope with the effects of breast cancer may have an impact on your level of distress, quality of life, and health. Poor adaptation has been associated with pessimism, hopelessness, isolation, rejection of help, persistent anxiety and depression, and current stressful life events. In contrast, active coping techniques are associated with better adaptation and health outcomes in women with breast cancer. Below is a list of strategies to enhance your coping.



## Seek Education and Ask Questions

- How can I manage my breast cancer risk factors?
- What are the available treatment options for me?
- What side-effects can I expect from a particular treatment?

## Make Healthy Lifestyle Changes

- Eat a healthy diet
- Exercise regularly
- Stretch
- Adhere to your medical regimen
- Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs
- Reduce caffeine and sugar
- Get enough sleep
- Eliminate unnecessary sources of stress

## Use Your Social Support System

- Fight the urge to withdraw
- Identify your sources of support (e.g., friends, family, significant other, church community)
- Communicate clearly and explicitly what you want others to do (and not do)

## Express Yourself

- Confide in others instead of bottling up your emotions
- Write in a journal
- Participate in an online support group or forum
- Let yourself cry
- Engage in artistic expression (e.g., dance, poetry, song-writing, visual arts, theater)
- Pray
- Learn and Practice Relaxation Techniques
- Deep breathing exercises
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Guided imagery
- Mindfulness meditation
- Yoga
- Tai Chi

(Continued on Next Page)

# Living Well Continued

## Make Time for Fun

- Watch a comedy
- Read something uplifting
- Socialize
- Do something you enjoy every day
- Keep your sense of humor
- Play with a pet
- Develop interests and hobbies (e.g., gardening, cooking, drawing, painting, learning a new language)
- Spend time with your children or grandchildren
- Sing
- Listen to music
- Dance

## Make Time for Self-Care

- Take breaks
- Take a long bath or hot shower
- Try some aroma therapy (e.g., scented candles, room spray, scented lotion)
- Savor a warm cup of coffee or tea
- Pamper yourself (e.g., massage, facial, manicure/pedicure, new hairstyle)
- Read a good book
- Listen to relaxing music
- Spend time in nature
- Go for a nice, scenic drive

## Adjust Your Thinking

- Try to remain optimistic
- Practice positive self-talk and affirmations
- Focus on areas that are still within your control
- Try not to blame yourself
- Practice self-compassion
- Give yourself permission to feel angry, sad, etc.
- Identify your strengths and resources
- View cancer as an obstacle to overcome
- Practice acceptance
- Express gratitude for the good in your life
- Focus on the “big picture” and one day at a time

## Find Positive Gains of the Cancer Experience

- Changed life priorities and values
- Enhanced sense of purpose and meaning in life
- Improved personal resources and coping skills
- Promoted positive health behaviors
- Strengthened interpersonal relationships
- Enhanced spirituality

## Seek Professional Support

- Individual Therapy or Counseling
- Family or Couples Therapy
- Medication for your mood – consult with your doctor
- Support Groups

# My Coping Resources

List your strategies and resources that may help you cope more effectively.

What have I done in the past that helped me cope with other stressful situations?

Who can I call or confide in when I am feeling upset?

If I am feeling anxious or “on edge,” what can I do to help calm and soothe myself?

If I am feeling sad or depressed, what can I do to help lift my mood?

What can I tell myself when I notice myself having negative thoughts?

What would I say to someone else (e.g., a close friend, my daughter) who was going through this?

What could I tell others to do (or not do) that would help?

What can I do to improve my self-care?



## Benefits of Support Groups

Support groups are an important resource for breast cancer patients and survivors. Below is a list of some of the benefits that you may gain by joining a breast cancer support group.

### Meet other women who are undergoing similar experiences

- Reduces isolation
- Normalizes the disease experience
- Addresses shared concerns that are common among women with breast cancer

### Supportive environment

- Allows you to receive support, understanding, and empathy from others
- Provides you with safe space to express your emotions and thoughts
- Instills a sense of hope

### Education

- Increases knowledge about available treatment options and resources
- Aids in decision-making
- Alleviates feelings of uncertainty
- Adjusts expectations
- Increases your sense of control

### Learn stress management and coping skills

- Alleviates distress
- Improves quality of life
- Increases your confidence in your ability to overcome obstacles

Contact the Breast Health Center at 415-600-2717 option 4 to learn more about current support groups offered in your preferred language.

# Notes



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