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Breast Cancer - Inflammatory - After Treatment [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the Cancer.Net Editorial Board [2], 08/2014

ON THIS PAGE: You will read about your medical care after cancer treatment is finished and why this follow-up care is important. To see other pages, use the menu on the side of your screen.

After treatment for breast cancer ends, talk with your doctor about developing a follow-up care plan. This plan may include regular physical examinations and/or medical tests to monitor your recovery for the coming months and years. ASCO?s recommendations for breast cancer follow-up care [3] include regular physical examinations and mammograms, among other recommendations. In addition, ASCO offers cancer treatment summaries and a survivorship care plan [4] to help keep track of the breast cancer treatment you received and develop a survivorship care plan once treatment is completed. In some instances, patients may be seen at survivorship clinics that specialize in the post-treatment needs of people with cancer.

Breast cancer can come back in the breast or other areas of the body. The symptoms of a cancer recurrence include a new lump in the breast, under the arm, or along the chest wall; bone pain or fractures; headaches or seizures; chronic coughing or trouble breathing; extreme fatigue; and/or feeling ill. Talk with your doctor if you have these or other symptoms. The possibility of recurrence is a common concern among cancer survivors; learn more about coping with fear of recurrence [5].

After a mastectomy or lumpectomy to treat breast cancer, the breast area may be scarred and may have a different shape or size than before surgery. If lymph nodes were removed as part of the surgery or affected during treatment, a condition called lymphedema [6] that causes swelling of the hand and/or arm may occur, and this is a life-long risk for patients.

Some patients experience breathlessness, a dry cough, and/or chest pain two to three months after finishing radiation therapy because the treatment can cause swelling and hardening or thickening of the lungs, called fibrosis. These symptoms are usually temporary. Talk with your doctor if you develop any new symptoms after radiation therapy or if the side effects are not going away.

Patients who received trastuzumab or certain types of chemotherapy called anthracyclines may be at risk of heart problems. Talk with your doctor about the best ways to check for heart problems.

In addition, women recovering from breast cancer have other symptoms that may last after treatment. Learn about ways of coping with cancer-related fatigue [7], a drop in cognitive function that is sometimes called "chemobrain", and other late effects [8] of cancer treatment.

Women recovering from breast cancer are encouraged to follow established guidelines for good health, such as maintaining a healthy weight, not smoking, eating a balanced diet, and having recommended cancer screening tests. Talk with your doctor to develop a plan that is best for your needs. Moderate physical activity can help rebuild your strength and energy level and may lower the risk of cancer recurrence. Your doctor can help you create a safe exercise plan based upon your needs, physical abilities, and fitness level. Learn more about the next steps to take in survivorship [9], including making positive lifestyle changes [10].

The next section offers a list of questions you may want to ask. Use the menu on the side of your screen to select Questions to Ask the Doctor, or you can select another section, to continue reading this guide.

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/breast-cancer-inflammatory/after-treatment
[2] http://www.cancer.net/about-us
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/29911
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