

## What's next in Breast Cancer follow-up care?

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Your Medical Oncologist will discuss your follow-up plan with you. There is a Survivorship Workshop available should you wish to attend. It is aimed at helping you in the transition to life after breast cancer treatment. It is common to have mixed emotions as you finish treatment and go on to the next steps in your journey. Please reach out to members of your health care team if you need support.

### What will my follow-up care look like?

#### Surveillance Guidelines

- **Mammogram**
  - Yearly
    - ✓ Mammograms should be done on both breasts. If you have had breast reconstruction, a mammogram should be done on the side of the surgery if there is any breast tissue remaining.
  
- **Physical Exam (including breast exam)**
  - If you have **recently completed treatment**, you should have a physical exam with your cancer care team:
    - ✓ Every 3-6 months for the first 3 years, every 6-12 months for the following 2 years and annually (yearly) thereafter.
  - If you are **finished your breast cancer care with your oncologist** at the Walker Family Cancer Centre, you should have a physical exam with your family doctor:
    - ✓ Yearly

#### Bone Mineral Density Scan

- It is recommended that your family doctor order this test as a baseline and then every year if you are taking hormonal treatment (anastrozole, exemestane, letrozole). If you are not on these medications, it is recommended to be done every 2-3 years after your baseline scan.

**\*these guidelines may vary or change depending on your type of breast cancer and situation.**

## What is important to report to my doctor?

- ✓ Any breast changes (new lumps or skin changes)
- ✓ Fatigue or tiredness that is not getting better
- ✓ New or worsening shortness of breath
- ✓ New or unexplained bone pain
- ✓ Unexplained weight loss
- ✓ Ongoing and unexplained abdominal (stomach) pain
- ✓ Unusual vaginal bleeding
- ✓ Return of period if you have had chemotherapy or hormonal treatment (anastrozole, letrozole, exemestane, tamoxifen, etc.)
- ✓ New headaches or neurological symptoms (change in speech, change in balance, etc.)
- ✓ Arm swelling on the side of your surgery
- ✓ Any questions about your medications or side effects



## Will I have side effects after my treatment is finished?

Your treatment side effects may continue after your treatment is finished, and you may notice new symptoms that may or may not be related to your treatments. It is important to know what these are, and what to do should you experience them.

### Lymphedema

This is the buildup of fluid in the tissues of your arm, wrist and/or hand as a result of having lymph nodes removed during surgery or damaged during radiation. This may cause an increase in size or swelling of the affected area. Risk factors for this include:

- being overweight
- having many nodes removed during your surgery
- radiation to the underarm
- having an infection in the arm

### What can I do to help prevent lymphedema?

- Maintain a healthy body weight
- Protect your affected arm/hand from injury or infection when carrying out daily activities. When possible, try to limit blood work and blood pressures from being taken on this side.

**Call your doctor right away if you notice any new swelling in your hands, arms or upper body.**

They will need to assess you and advise you as to the next steps.

### Some signs and symptoms of lymphedema include:

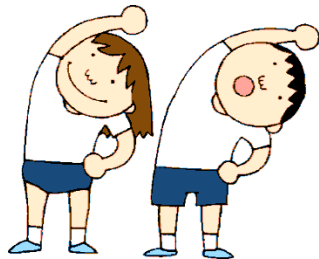
- Your arm may ache, feel heavy, feel stiff and uncomfortable;
- You may feel tingling in your arm and fingers;
- Your clothing or jewellery may feel tighter than usual or you may be able to see the swelling in your arm;
- You may have a harder time doing some activities

**Lymphedema can occur at any point in your life, so it is important that you watch for signs and symptoms.**

### Fatigue (tiredness)

Fatigue or tiredness is the most common side effect felt by cancer patients, and there are many causes of why you may be feeling this way. Your fatigue should improve over time, although some people may experience this for months or even years after treatment is complete. If you are finding you are still feeling fatigued for longer than 3-6 months after your treatment is finished, please see your family doctor. In some situations, there can be other health or treatment-related causes of the fatigue that may need the attention of your doctor.

### What can I do to help manage my fatigue?



**Be active!  
Exercise is the best way  
to increase your energy  
which will help to  
improve your fatigue!**

- ✓ try to wake up at the same time every day
- ✓ if you need a nap, try to make it less than 1 hour
- ✓ limit your caffeine (coffee, tea, colas, chocolate) in the afternoon and evening
- ✓ try to relax before bed –take a bath, read, or meditate
- ✓ try to manage any stress – reach out to a member of your health care team to talk about your feelings or connect with a support group in your community
- ✓ pace yourself and save your energy for the most important activities – ask for help
- ✓ eat well and stay hydrated – try to eat healthy foods and drink at least 6-8 glasses of water or liquids every day

**If you have any questions about what exercise you can do, please talk to your doctor**

## Peripheral Neuropathy

Some of the chemotherapy drugs used in treating your cancer may cause something called peripheral neuropathy. This can happen if these drugs affect any of the nerves in your body. If you have or develop peripheral neuropathy, you may feel:

- ✓ numbness
- ✓ tingling
- ✓ pain in your fingers, toes, and feet that feels like “pins and needles”

These sensations can occur anywhere depending on the location of the nerve affected. Everyone experiences this differently, some may have developed this during treatment, and others may develop it after treatment is finished. Please speak with your doctor should you start experiencing this, there are medications and treatments that can help. Usually, this resolves within months and sometimes years.

### What can I do to help if I develop peripheral neuropathy?

- Take care of yourself:
  - ✓ Wear loose-fitting cotton socks and shoes with good support
  - ✓ Look for helpful tools to help hold forks, knives, pens, etc.
  - ✓ Look for stretchy shoelaces, zipper pulls, and tools to help you do up buttons
- Be safe:
  - ✓ Have well-lit spaces, use night lights
  - ✓ Make sure there are handrails on both sides of all stairways
  - ✓ Use non-skid strips or mats in the tub or shower
  - ✓ Avoid sudden movements and take time when getting up from sitting
  - ✓ Avoid walking in bare feet
  - ✓ Check the temperature of the water with a part of your body that has normal sensation
  - ✓ Use rubber gloves when washing dishes

### Arthralgia (joint stiffness and/or pain)

If you have been prescribed hormonal therapy (letrozole, anastrozole, exemestane, tamoxifen), you may experience stiffness or pain in the joints of your wrists, hips, knees, and ankles that you may notice gets better throughout the day.

### What can I do to help joint stiffness/pain?

- ✓ **exercise regularly**
- ✓ physiotherapy
- ✓ massage therapy
- ✓ anti-inflammatory medications may help – please discuss the use of medications with your family doctor

**\*if your joint stiffness or pain is not improving with these tips, you may need to see your doctor to discuss using another type of medication**

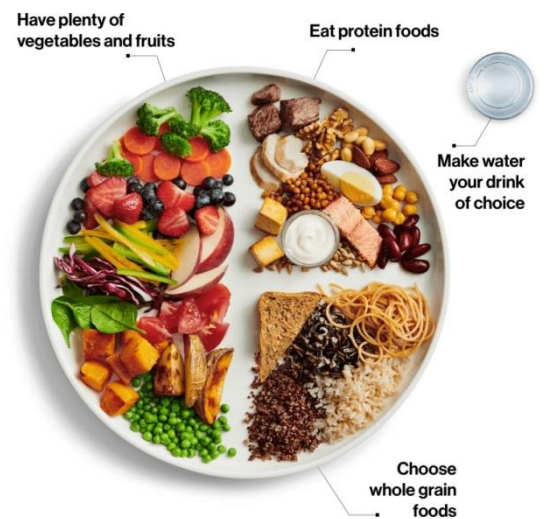
### Weight Gain

Weight gain is common for patients with a cancer diagnosis and/or have had treatment for their cancer. This can happen for many reasons and may be worsened by the side effects of your treatments (joint pain/stiffness, hot flashes). Sometimes weight gain may be caused by other health reasons that should be ruled out by your family doctor.

### What can I do to help with weight gain?

- ✓ **exercise regularly**
- ✓ choose healthy foods and portion sizes
- ✓ ask for a referral to a dietician if you have challenges
- ✓ join a community support group

### Eat Well Plate



### Menopausal Symptoms

Many of the medications used to treat breast cancer can cause you to feel menopausal symptoms. These may include:

- ✓ hot flashes
- ✓ vaginal dryness, painful intercourse, and effects on libido (this can be very common if you are taking letrozole, anastrozole, or exemestane)

### What can I do to help?

- ✓ see your doctor to discuss the use of medications to treat bothersome hot flashes. Medications such as Venlafaxine, Citalopram, and Clonidine may help you.
- ✓ use vaginal moisturizers (e.g., RepaGyn) regularly if you are experiencing vaginal dryness
- ✓ use a lubricant prior to sexual activity and intercourse

### Is there anything I should avoid?

- ✗ the use of herbal-remedies to treat your hot flashes (these may have estrogen related compounds which should be avoided)
- ✗ products (including creams or lotions) that contain estrogen for vaginal dryness

### Osteoporosis/low bone mineral density

Some of the drugs used in treating breast cancer may speed up bone loss. Please refer to the Surveillance Guideline section on page 1 of this handout to review when you should have your bone density assessed.

### What can I do to help prevent bone loss?

- ✓ weight bearing exercise (e.g., walking, running)
- ✓ eat a diet rich in calcium – you may need to take a supplement if you are not eating enough
- ✓ take 1000-2000 IU of Vitamin D daily
- ✓ quit smoking if you do smoke – please reach out for community support if you need help with this

### Psychosocial Concerns

You may find yourself feeling anxious, depressed, sad, or scared of your cancer returning. You may have concerns about your body image, relationships, or spirituality. You may also experience:

- ✓ low energy
- ✓ feeling sluggish or agitated
- ✓ sleeping more or less than you used to
- ✓ eating more or less than you used to
- ✓ feelings of guilt or regret
- ✓ not enjoying the things you used to
- ✓ have difficulty concentrating

These are only some of the things you may be feeling. Please reach out to your family doctor if you are worried in any way about these feelings. They can connect you with a social worker or community support that can help. You may be prescribed medications that can help with anxiety or depression.

## What can I expect if I have had Radiation treatment?

Your Radiation Oncologist will discuss your follow-up care with you as you near the end of your radiation treatment. You may experience some changes after you have completed your radiation treatment. It is important to know what changes are normal and what changes should be seen by a doctor.

- **Normal changes after radiation**

- ✓ hyperpigmentation or darkening of the skin in the area treated
- ✓ superficial dilated blood vessels in the treatment area that can appear even years later (telangiectasia)
- ✓ thickened skin and increased density of the breast tissue if you have had a lumpectomy
- ✓ thickening around your surgical scar- this should improve over time
- ✓ if you have been told you have a seroma, this may remain. This will feel like a lump around the area of your surgery
- ✓ you may see a thick cord that stretches from you under your arm to the upper part of your arm or down to below your elbow



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- **Changes that should be seen by a doctor**

- ✓ new lump in your breast, around the area of your scar
- ✓ new lump in your neck or under your arm
- ✓ new redness to the skin of your breast
- ✓ new pain in your breast
- ✓ new changes to the look of your nipple





## Resources you may find helpful:

Canadian Cancer Society's *Sexuality and Cancer* booklet

Cancer Care Ontario's *How to Manage Your Fatigue* booklet

Cancer Care Ontario's *How to Manage Your Depression* booklet

Cancer Care Ontario's *Intimacy and Sex Guide*

Niagara Region Public Health Tobacco Hotline

**1-888-505-6074 x7393**

smokershelpline.ca

Wellspring Niagara

**(905) 684-7619**

In need of a Family Doctor:

Niagara Health Physicians Taking New Patients Information Line

**905-378-4647  
extension 44773**

Health Care Connect

**1-800-445-1822**



**Canadian  
Cancer  
Society**

**Information in this handout was used or adapted from:**

BC Cancer Agency, revised 2014. Symptom Management Guidelines: *Chemotherapy–induced peripheral neuropathy*.

Cancer Care Ontario (2015). *How to manage your fatigue*.

Cancer Care Ontario (2016). *How to manage your depression*.

Juravinski Cancer Centre (2015). Lymphedema.

Southwest Regional Cancer Program, 2013. Pink Notes: A resource guide for primary care. *Evidence based guidelines for breast cancer patient follow up and side effects*.

Walker Family Cancer Centre, 2015. Peripheral Neuropathy.