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After Male Breast Cancer Treatment

Get information about life as a cancer survivor, next steps, and what you can do to help.

Living as a Cancer Survivor

For many people, completing cancer treatment often raises questions about next steps as a survivor.

[What Happens After Treatment for Breast Cancer in Men?](#)

What Happens After Treatment for Breast Cancer in Men?

- [Getting emotional support](#)

For many men with breast cancer, treatment can remove or destroy the cancer. The end of treatment can be both stressful and exciting. You may be relieved to finish treatment, but it's hard not to worry about cancer coming back. This is very common if you've had cancer.

For other people, the cancer may never go away completely. Some people may get regular treatments with chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or other therapies to try to help keep the cancer in check. Learning to live with cancer that does not go away can be difficult and very stressful.

Other tests: Other tests such as blood tumor marker studies, blood tests of liver function, bone scans, and chest x-rays are not a standard part of follow-up. Getting these tests doesn't help someone treated with breast cancer live longer. They will be done (as indicated) if you have symptoms or physical exam findings that suggest that the cancer has recurred. These and other tests may be done as part of evaluating new treatments by _____

Keeping health insurance and copies of your medical records

Even after treatment, it's very important to keep health insurance. Tests and doctor visits cost a lot, and even though no one wants to think about their cancer coming back, this could happen.

At some point after your cancer treatment, you might find yourself seeing a new doctor who doesn't know about your medical history. It's important to keep copies of your medical records to give your new doctor the details of your diagnosis and treatment. Learn more in [Keeping Copies of Important Medical Records⁴](#).

Can I lower my risk of breast cancer progressing or coming back?

If you have (or have had) breast cancer, you probably want to know if there are things you can do (aside from your treatment) that might lower your risk of the cancer growing or coming back, such as getting or staying active, eating a certain type of diet, or taking nutritional supplements.

Research has found that some things that might be helpful, but nearly all of the studies on this topic have been done in women with breast cancer, since breast cancer in men is rare.

Still, doing what you can to stay as healthy as possible is more important than ever after breast cancer treatment. [Controlling your weight, staying active, and eating right⁵](#) may help you lower your risk of your breast cancer coming back, as well as help protect you from other health problems.

Getting to a healthy weight

If you have had breast cancer, getting to and staying at a healthy weight might help lower your risk of the cancer coming back. A lot of research suggests that being overweight or obese (very overweight) raises this risk. It has also been linked with a higher risk of getting [lymphedema⁶](#), as well as a higher risk of dying from breast cancer.

However, there is less research to show whether losing weight during or after treatment can actually lower the risk of breast cancer coming back. This is complicated by the fact that many people gain weight (without trying) during breast cancer treatment, which itself might increase risk.

Of course, for men who are overweight, getting to a healthy weight can also have other health benefits. Getting to a healthy weight might also lower your risk of getting some

other cancers, as well as some other chronic diseases.

Because of the possible health benefits of losing weight, many health care providers now encourage men who are overweight to get to and stay at a healthy weight. Still, it's important to discuss this with your doctor before trying to lose weight, especially if you are still getting treatment or have just finished it. Your health care team can help you create a plan to lose weight safely.

Being physically active

Among female breast cancer survivors, studies have found a consistent link between physical activity and a lower risk of breast cancer coming back and of dying from breast cancer, as well as of dying from any cause. This has not been well studied in men, but it may still apply. Physical activity has also been linked to improvements in quality of life, physical functioning, and fewer [fatigue](#)⁷ symptoms.

It's not clear exactly how much activity might be needed, but more seems to be better. More vigorous activity may also be more helpful than less vigorous activity. But further studies are needed to help clarify this.

In the past, breast cancer survivors with **lymphedema** were often advised to avoid certain arm exercises and vigorous activities. But studies have found that such physical activity is safe when done properly. In fact, it might actually lower the risk of lymphedema, or improve lymphedema for someone who already has it.

As with other types of lifestyle changes, it's important to talk with your treatment team before starting a new physical activity program. This will likely include meeting with a physical therapist as well. Your team can help you plan a program that can be both safe and effective for you.

Eating a healthy diet

Most research on possible links between diet and the risk of breast cancer coming back has looked at broad dietary patterns, rather than specific foods. In general, it's not clear if eating any specific type of diet can help lower your risk of breast cancer coming back.

Studies have found that female breast cancer survivors who eat diets high in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, chicken, and fish tend to live longer than those who eat diets that have more refined sugars, fats, red meats (such as beef, pork, and lamb), and processed meats (such as bacon, sausage, luncheon meats, and hot dogs). But it's not clear if this is due to effects on breast cancer or possibly to other health benefits of

eating a healthy diet.

Many people have questions about whether **soy products** are safe to eat after a diagnosis of breast cancer. Soy foods are rich sources of compounds called *isoflavones* that can have estrogen-like properties in the body. Some studies in women have suggested that soy food intake might lower the risk of breast cancer coming back, although more research is needed to confirm this. While eating soy foods doesn't seem to pose a risk, the evidence regarding the effects of taking soy or isoflavone supplements, which often contain much higher levels of these compounds, is not as clear.

While the links between specific types of diets and breast cancer coming back are not certain, there are clearly health benefits to eating well. For example, diets that are rich in plant sources are often an important part of getting to and staying at a healthy weight. Eating a healthy diet can also help lower your risk for some other health problems, such as heart disease and diabetes.

Dietary supplements

Some people want to know if there are any dietary or nutritional supplements they can take to help lower their risk. So far, no dietary supplements (including vitamins, minerals, and herbal products) have been shown to clearly help lower the risk of breast cancer progressing or coming back, in men or women. This doesn't mean that none will help, but it's important to know that none have been proven to do so.

Dietary supplements are not regulated like medicines in the United States – they do not have to be proven effective (or even safe) before being sold, although there are limits on what they're allowed to claim they can do. If you're thinking about taking any type of nutritional supplement, talk to your health care team. They can help you decide which ones you can use safely while avoiding those that might be harmful.

Alcohol

It's clear that alcohol – even as little as a few drinks a week – increases the risk of *getting* breast cancer, at least among women. But whether alcohol affects the risk of breast cancer *coming back* is not as clear. Drinking alcohol can raise the levels of estrogen in the body, which in theory could increase the risk of breast cancer coming back. But there is no strong evidence from studies to support this.

but men who do drink should have no more than 2 drinks a day.

Because this issue is complex, it's important to discuss it with your health care team, taking into account your risk of breast cancer coming back (or getting a new cancer) and your risk of other health issues linked to alcohol use.

If the cancer comes back

If cancer does return, your treatment options will depend on where it comes back, what treatments you've had before, and your current health and preferences. For more information on how recurrent cancer is treated, see [Treatment of Breast Cancer in Men, by Stage](#)⁹.

Second cancers after treatment

Men who have had breast cancer can also still get other types of cancer. Men with breast cancer should be offered genetic testing to see if they have a hereditary cancer syndrome and could be at a very high risk for other cancers. They also have a normal risk for other types of cancers. Learn more in [Second Cancers After Male Breast Cancer](#).

Getting emotional support

Some amount of feeling depressed, anxious, or worried is normal when breast cancer is a part of your life. Some people are affected more than others. But everyone can benefit from help and support from other people, whether friends and family, religious groups, support groups, professional counselors, or others. Learn more in [Life After Cancer](#)¹⁰.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/making-treatment-decisions/clinical-trials.html
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/screening/american-cancer-society-guidelines-for-the-early-detection-of-cancer.html
4. www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/long-term-health-concerns/keeping-copies-of-

- [important-medical-records.html](#)
5. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention.html
 6. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/swelling/lymphedema.html
 7. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/side-effects/fatigue.html
 8. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/diet-physical-activity/alcohol-use-and-cancer.html
 9. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/breast-cancer-in-men/treating/by-stage.html
 10. www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/be-healthy-after-treatment/life-after-cancer.html

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Rock CL, Thomson CA, Sullivan KR, et al. American Cancer Society nutrition and physical activity guideline for cancer survivors. *CA Cancer J Clin*. 2022. Accessed at <https://acsjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.3322/caac.21719> on March 16, 2022.

Rock CL, Thomson C, Gansler T, et al. American Cancer Society guideline for diet and physical activity for cancer prevention. *CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians*. 2020;70(4). doi:10.3322/caac.21591. Accessed at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.3322/caac.21591> on June 9, 2020.

Last Revised: March 16, 2022

Second Cancers After Male Breast Cancer

- [Follow-up care for men after breast cancer treatment](#)

Breast cancer survivors can be affected by a number of health problems, but often a major concern is facing cancer again. Cancer that comes back after treatment is called a *recurrence*. But some cancer survivors develop a new, unrelated cancer later. This is called a *second cancer*.

Men who have had breast cancer can get any type of second cancer, but they have a higher increased risk for certain types of cancer, including:

- A second breast cancer (this is different than the first cancer coming back)
- [Small intestine cancer](#)¹
- [Rectal cancer](#)²
- [Pancreas cancer](#)³
- [Prostate cancer](#)⁴
- [Basal and squamous cell skin cancer](#)⁵
- [Myeloid leukemia](#)⁶

For some second cancers, shared genetic risk factors may play a role. For example,

processed foods

- It's best not to drink [alcohol](#)¹⁰. If you do drink, men should have no more than 2 drinks per day

These steps may also lower the risk of some cancers.

See [Second Cancers in Adults](#)¹¹ for more information about causes of second cancers.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/small-intestine-cancer.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/colon-rectal-cancer.html
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/pancreatic-cancer.html
4. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/prostate-cancer.html
5. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/basal-and-squamous-cell-skin-cancer.html
6. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/leukemia.html
7. www.cancer.org/cancer/screening/american-cancer-society-guidelines-for-the-early-detection-of-cancer.html
8. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/tobacco.html
9. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/diet-physical-activity.html
10. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/diet-physical-activity/alcohol-use-and-cancer.html
11. www.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/long-term-health-concerns/second-cancers-in-adults.html

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Rock CL, Thomson C, Gansler T, et al. American Cancer Society guideline for diet and physical activity for cancer prevention. *CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians*. 2020;70(4). doi:10.3322/caac.21591. Accessed at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.3322/caac.21591> on June 9, 2020.

Last Revised: June 9, 2020

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