



CANCERcare®

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fact sheet

NEWLY DIAGNOSED AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

As you start getting more information about your diagnosis, you will come to learn that there are many effective treatment options and many places you can turn to for help and hope.

WHEN YOU RECEIVES A CANCER DIAGNOSIS, CANCERCARE RECOMMENDS THE FOLLOWING:

Form a good health care team.

Doctors who specialize in treating cancer are called oncologists. It's important to get your medical care from an oncologist who specializes in treating your specific cancer. The best cancer centers have many different kinds of doctors and professionals who work together as a team – oncologists, surgeons, radiation oncologists, nurses, registered dietitians, social workers, and others.

Advocate for yourself. The members of your health care team are experts in treating cancer, but you are the expert on your own life and body. Speak up about your needs and concerns so you can get the best care possible. Ask follow-up questions as needed, and explore resources available. Be mindful and voice any obstacles that may impact your treatment.

Remember that you are not alone. There are many sources of support available to you, including your health care team, social workers, supportive family and friends, members of your faith or spiritual community, and others. There are also organizations, such as CancerCare, that can help.

BREAST CANCER TREATMENT OPTIONS

Women with breast cancer have more treatment options than ever before. The right treatment for you will depend on your tumor type, its characteristics, your overall health, and your lifestyle.



The following types of treatment are used for breast cancer:

- **Surgery.** Most women with breast cancer will have surgery to remove their tumor. To try to prevent cancer from coming back, surgery may be combined with other types of treatment. Types of surgery used to remove tumors include:
 - **Lumpectomy.** Removes only the tumor and a small amount of the tissue surrounding it. This kind of surgery is usually followed by radiation.
 - **Mastectomy.** Removes the entire breast that has the tumor. After a mastectomy, reconstructive surgery can rebuild your breast so it is about the same size and shape as it was before.

Chemotherapy. Chemotherapy refers to drugs that kill rapidly dividing cells. This type of treatment kills cancer cells, but harms some healthy cells as well, which can lead to various side effects.

Targeted treatments. These are drugs designed to kill only cancer cells, not healthy cells. They usually have different side effects than traditional chemotherapy.

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Hormonal therapy. Some breast cancers grow in response to the hormones estrogen and progesterone. Hormonal treatments block these hormones or reduce their amount in the body.

Radiation. Radiation refers to the use of special high-energy beams to stop cancer cells from growing and multiplying.

TIPS FOR MAKING TREATMENT DECISIONS

Get involved in your care. When your health care team recommends a treatment, make sure you understand why. Ask questions about anything you don't understand.

Be informed. Ask your doctor where you can get more information about your diagnosis or the treatment he or she is recommending.

Get a second opinion. To be sure you are aware of all your options, make an appointment with another oncologist to discuss treatment recommendations.

Get the details. Talk with your doctor about what you can expect from your treatment. Some questions you may want to ask include:

- What is the recommended treatment?
- How will it be given? Will I need to go to the doctor's office or hospital to get my treatment, or will I get medication I can take at home?
- How often will I receive treatment, and for how long? What are some side effects?
- What are the possible benefits and risks of this treatment?
- How much will my treatment cost?
- If I have questions during my treatment and my doctor is not available, who can I ask? For example, is there a nurse, social worker, or other specialist available?

TIPS FOR LOOKING AND FEELING YOUR BEST DURING TREATMENT

Follow your doctor's advice. Your medications and other treatments work best when you follow all your doctor's instructions carefully. Write down all instructions, or ask your doctor or nurse to write them down for you.

Keep a side effect journal. When you experience a side effect, write down the date and time it happens, how strong it is, and how it affects you or your daily activities. Take this journal with you on doctor's visits to share the information about your symptoms with your health care team. If side effects are dismissed, continue to stress any concerns you may have.

Get support. Joining a support group for women with breast cancer gives you a chance to talk with others who understand what you are going through. Talking one-on-one with an oncology social worker gives you a safe place to talk about your concerns. CancerCare offers free face-to-face, telephone and online support groups led by professional oncology social workers.

CancerCare® Can Help

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include case management, counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by master's-prepared oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit www.cancercare.org or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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This fact sheet is supported by Takeda Oncology.*



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