

Tips and Suggestions for Breast Cancer Patients

From Elisa Guida

As a two-time breast cancer survivor myself, I received many tips from others and developed many of my own. I have compiled all of these tips, suggestions and other information so that they are available for you as you navigate your journey from diagnosis and treatment of your breast cancer to survivorship!

As it states in the title, these are just tips and suggestions. You are empowered to make decisions about your own health and well-being and these decisions should be based on knowledge, rather than fear! There are helpful and supportive services that are available to you, but keep in mind that every diagnosis is unique and should be dealt with that way. What works for one person may not work for another.

If you discover any other information or have recommendations that you feel would be helpful to others, please contact me. I would love to hear from you!

My personal opinion is to get a second opinion, maybe even a third or fourth opinion. Make sure you are comfortable with your surgeon and oncologist.

MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH BREAST CANCER

I am a two-time breast cancer survivor or striver as I would like to call myself! My first diagnosis of breast cancer came in 1995 at the age of 40 and it returned 10 years later. No lump was detected either time, which highlights, in my case, the importance of regular mammograms.

My first encounter in 1995 involved a lumpectomy, lymph node removal, and 6 ½ weeks of radiation, which rendered my arm numb for 9 ½ years. The second time around, which involved a mastectomy, was actually much easier. I was much better prepared the second time around because of the research I did prior to meeting with my surgeon. I also participated in a healing service. My surgery was on a Monday, I came home on a Tuesday, was out grocery shopping on Friday, without any bruising or pain.

After doing my research and consulting with a plastic surgeon regarding reconstruction and the complications that could arise from reconstructing a radiated breast area, I chose not to have it; I knew it wasn't for me. The second time around, I just wanted things over as quickly as possible so that I could move on with my life. It has been several years now since my recurrence and I have not looked back at any of my decisions! I chose to move forward with my life and everything that I love – music, jewelry, and gardening.

MY PERSONAL TIPS TO YOU

Below is a list of things that I have learned since my initial diagnosis that I would like to share with you. Some are philosophical (you get that way with a diagnosis of cancer!) while others are practical. As I said above, every diagnosis is unique and should be treated as such. Do your research and learn from others so that you can make informed decisions based on knowledge and not fear. These are YOUR decisions! Once you have your plan of action in place, you will feel a lot better. Now is the time to put YOU first. You will need your strength during this time. You will be very surprised how strong you really are!

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MY PERSONAL TIPS TO YOU continued...

- Do not put things off and do not take things for granted!
- When you are diagnosed, it is very important to take the time to put yourself first. It is a long journey and it is best to have a positive outlook. This is the time to lean on family, friends and other survivors.
- Surround yourself with the things you love. I had my family, friends, and lots of prayers, jewelry, my garden and my beloved Phillies - all of which helped me through my journey and still do today.
- Do your research. Learn about your diagnosis and its various treatments so that you become empowered to make your own decisions about your care.
- Consider complementary therapies to assist with side effects of the medical therapies. Examples include yoga, meditation, guided imagery, massage, acupuncture, etc. See the National Cancer Institute's Office of Cancer Complementary and Alternative Medicine (OCCAM) website below for more information.
- Learn about nutrition and its link to cancer. See the list of books below and the book on nutrition, **Beating Cancer With Nutrition**
- Keep a journal. Document all of your appointments.
- Obtain copies of all the results from all of your tests so that you have your own records. Ensure that all records are dated.
- Get a second opinion, if possible. In some cases, there are different treatments for the specific types of cancer.
- In the event of a recurrence, you may be eligible for a clinical trial that is offered at other cancer treatment centers in nearby cities. You might want to look into immunotherapy to see if you qualify.
- If you have a mastectomy and opt out of breast reconstruction, you may want to consider a breast prosthesis. Go to the prosthesis provider prior to surgery, so that you can see it, feel it, and decide if it's for you or not. You might want to join the Flat and Fabulous FB group.
- If you do have a mastectomy, consider requesting that the surgeon put the drain in the front, underneath and to the side of the mastectomy. This allows you to lie down more comfortably than if the drain is on the back or side.
- Consider getting a home health care nurse for at least a week after surgery to assist with changing the drain and checking on your progress post-operatively. This is often covered by health insurance.
- If you require chemotherapy or radiation therapy afterwards, there are many programs and services to help with wigs, scarves and turbans. If your friends wish to help or you want to help another breast cancer patient, consider a scarf and hat party. The hats and scarves provide some color and glamour during chemo and radiation treatments.
- Above all, eat healthy, stay rested, and if you can depend on your friends and family to help.

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RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Dr. Susan Love's Breast Book by Susan M. Love, and M.D., Karen Lindsey

Dr. Susan Love's Breast Book has long been the bible for the newly diagnosed. It also becomes a guide for those at risk of getting breast cancer, survivors interested in the consequences of their treatment, and anyone who wants to understand the new research about how the local environment influences the manifestations and treatments of many different kinds of breast cancer. Major advances being made in genetic research today mean that prevention and treatment can work not only to get rid of mutated cells (through chemo or surgery), but also to change the environment around the cells (through hormone therapy, exercise, and stress reduction). Among other promising developments discussed are advances in imaging, recognition of breast density as a risk factor, and a section focused on "personalized medicine" to help determine what kind of cancer you have and how best to treat it.

Crazy Sexy Cancer Tips by Kris Carr and Foreword by Sheryl Crow

Very inspirational! Kris is surviving with stage 4 liver cancer. Actress and photographer Kris Carr thought she had a hangover, but a Jivamukti yoga class didn't provide its usual kick-ass cure. A visit to her doctor confirmed her "liver looked like Swiss cheese," covered with cancerous tumors. She entered trench warfare (wearing cowboy boots into the MRI machine, no less), vowing, "Cancer needed a makeover and I was just the gal to do it!" She began writing and filming her journey, documenting her interactions with friends, doctors, alternative "quacks," blind dates, and other women with cancer—sadly a growing group. These include hip, young women such as illustrator-author Marisa Acocella Marchetto (*Cancer Vixen*), *Glamour* writer-editor Erin Zammett (*My So-Called Normal Life*), MTV personality Diem Brown (*Real World/Road Rules Challenge*), model Sharon Blynn (founder, Bald Is Beautiful), and music manager Jackie Farry, among others.

Beating Cancer With Nutrition by Patrick Quillin, PHD,RD,CNS with Noreen Quillin

This book offers up-to-date information about the human body's own "host defense mechanisms" in the war on cancer, providing a multidisciplinary approach to treatment based on scientific studies and clinical experience. Quillin, a medical professional who has published extensively, has conducted nutrition studies with hundreds of patients in formal clinical settings. He discusses conventional therapies (chemotherapy, surgery), alternative therapies (macrobiotics, herbal and vitamin therapies), and related factors.

When I read this book, I found out that SUGAR fuels the cancer cells!

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Books continued.....

Love, Medicine & Miracles: Lessons Learned about Self-healing from a Surgeon's Experience with Exceptional Patient by Bernie S. Siegel, M.D.

Siegel, a New Haven surgeon, believes that the power of healing stems from the human mind and will, that his scalpel only buys time against cancer, and that self-love and determination are more important than choice of therapy. His philosophy has caused radical changes in his practice. Siegel recounts many arresting anecdotes: joyous stories of patients who survived against all odds, sad chronicles of those who seemingly gave up and assented to their own deaths. The author's credentials make this one of the more plausible books on the mind-body connection.

Knockout: Interviews with Doctors Who Are Curing Cancer—And How to Prevent Getting It in the First Place by Suzanne Somers

In *Knockout*, Suzanne Somers interviews doctors who are successfully using the most innovative cancer treatments—treatments that build up the body rather than tear it down. Somers herself has stared cancer in the face, and a decade later she has conquered her fear and has emerged confident with the path she's chosen. She shares her personal choices and outlines an array of options from doctors across the country.

The Silver Lining: A Supportive and Insightful Guide to Breast Cancer by Hollye Jacobs

As a healthy, happy thirty-nine-year-old mother with no family history of breast cancer, being diagnosed with the disease rocked Hollye Jacobs's world. Having worked as a nurse, social worker, and child development specialist for fifteen years, she suddenly found herself in the position of moving into the hospital bed. She was trained as a clinician to heal. In her role as patient, the healing process became personal. Exquisitely illustrated with full-color photographs by Hollye's close friend, award-winning photographer Elizabeth Messina, *The Silver Lining* is both Hollye's memoir and a practical, supportive resource for anyone whose life has been touched by breast cancer. The Silver Lining of Hollye's illness is that she can now use the knowledge gleaned from her experience to try to make it better for those who have to follow her down this difficult path. This is why she is sharing her story. At once comforting and instructive, realistic and inspiring, *The Silver Lining* is a visually beautiful, poignant must-read for everyone who has been touched by cancer.

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RECOMMENDED WEBSITES

BREASTCANCER.ORG

<http://www.breastcancer.org/>
<http://www.facebook.com/breastcancerorg>

Breastcancer.org is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing the most reliable, complete, and up-to-date information about breast cancer. Our mission is to help women and their loved ones make sense of the complex medical and personal information about breast cancer, so they can make the best decisions for their lives.

You will find information about symptoms and diagnosis, treatment and side effects, day-to-day matters, such as nutrition, exercise and intimacy, lowering your risks of cancer, discussion boards and blogs and much, much more.

Marisa Weiss, M.D. is the founder, president, and guiding force behind Breastcancer.org, the world's most utilized online resource for medical and personal expert information on breast health and breast cancer — reaching 27 million people globally over the past 10 years.

Living Beyond Breast Cancer

<http://www.lbbc.org/>
<http://www.facebook.com/livingbeyondbreastcancer>

Living Beyond Breast Cancer (LBBC) is dedicated to assisting you, whether you are newly diagnosed, in treatment, recently completed treatment, are years beyond or are living with metastatic breast cancer. We are also here for your family members, caregivers, friends and healthcare providers to provide breast cancer information and support |

As a national education and support organization, our goal is to improve your quality of life and help you take an active role in your ongoing recovery or management of the disease, regardless of educational background, social support or financial means.

Living Beyond Breast Cancer offers programs and services to women affected by breast cancer, caregivers and healthcare providers including:

- toll-free Survivors' Helpline staffed by trained volunteers at (888) 753-LBBC (5222)
- national conferences
- free teleconferences
- community programs
- newsletters and publications
- recordings and transcripts
- small grants to help improve quality of life
- workshops and trainings for healthcare professionals.

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Kris Carr – Home of Crazy Sexy Wellness Revolution

<http://krisscarr.com>

Kris Carr is a multi-week New York Times best-selling author, speaker, and health advocate and she was diagnosed with Stage 4 Cancer in 2003. She is the subject and director of the documentary, Crazy Sexy Cancer, which aired on TLC and The Oprah Winfrey Network. Kris is also the author of award-winning Crazy Sexy Cancer book series. Her latest books, Crazy Sexy Diet and Crazy Sexy Kitchen, will change the way you live, love and eat! Kris regularly lectures at hospitals, wellness centers, corporations, such as Whole Foods, and Harvard University, and is a contributing Editor for Natural Health Magazine. Some media appearances include: The New York Times, Scientific American, Glamour, Vanity Fair, Good Morning America, Today, The Early Show, CBS Evening News, Access Hollywood, The Doctors, The Gayle King Show, Super Soul Sunday and The Oprah Winfrey Show. As an irreverent foot soldier in the fight against disease, Kris inspires countless people to take charge of their health and happiness by adopting a plant-passionate diet, improving lifestyle practices, and learning to live and love like you really mean it. Her motto: Make juice, not war!

Linked by Pink – Increasing Awareness of Young Breast Cancer

<http://linkedbypink.org/>

Linked By Pink is a Non-Profit Organization consisting of Erie and surrounding area women diagnosed with breast cancer. We all understand a diagnosis, as we all have been through one before the age of 45. We understand the roller coaster of emotions, the fears, and the frustrations. We also have found a comfort in one another because we understand better than anyone what we each are feeling and thinking. We have also found humor in the face of this demon, we call breast cancer. It cannot stop us from laughing, loving, and living life to the fullest. A breast cancer diagnosis is a very physical, emotional, and spiritual journey, but you need to know you are not alone. We are here for you; to listen, to connect you to resources, to make you feel that you are in a place where you feel you belong, and to help make you laugh. Laughter is a key role in healing!

We hold monthly support meetings for those diagnosed in the Erie, PA area, as well as host various fundraisers throughout the year. The funds we raise are kept in the local Erie area. We have been a financial resource for those diagnosed. We have a scholarship for children who have had a parent that has been diagnosed and a grant for women who are in need of medical assistance. We have also been able to donate directly to other organizations in the area such as the Regional Cancer Center, The John Kanzius Foundation, The American Cancer Society and the Susan G. Komen Foundation, based in Pittsburgh, PA.

Contact by e-mail: info@linkedbypink.org

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PA Breast Cancer Coalition

www.pabreastcancer.org 1-800-377-8828.

The PBCC is a statewide organization based in Lebanon, Lebanon County, with a board of directors, a staff of eight and a network of volunteers across the state. The PBCC exists to help the 12,000 women in Pennsylvania who will be diagnosed with breast cancer this year, to support the families of the 2,200 women who will lose that battle and to serve as a resource for the hundreds of thousands more women currently living with the disease.

We accomplish this through statewide educational programming, legislative advocacy and breast cancer research grants.

The Pink Fund

www.thepinkfund.org or 1-248-505-5222

The Pink Fund provides short term financial aid to working individuals diagnosed with breast cancer, and in active treatment, who have lost their job, or taken a medical leave as a result of their diagnosis and treatment and are not collecting a pay check. (Individuals who are working part-time or receiving disability from their place of employment may qualify for support.)