

Breast Cancer? Some General Guidelines to help you through your diagnosis

By Barb Daize RN

These are general guidelines only. Please check with your healthcare professional if you have any questions or concerns

Initial Breast Examination

A lump or change in the breast may be found through a breast self exam, a physician's exam, or a routine mammogram.

If this happens the doctor will send you for some tests which may include a mammogram, an ultrasound an MRI or a biopsy.

If a mammogram shows an area of concern or suspicion it is not uncommon for the technicians to suggest more pictures/views or an ultrasound.

Call Back

This call back or suspicion does not in any way indicate that you have cancer. It means they want to be sure they are getting a good look at the area they are concerned about. The radiologist may want to do a biopsy of the lump to find out if it is cancer, or you may be sent to a surgeon to book a surgical biopsy.

Breast Cancer Diagnosis

If the lump turns out to be a breast cancer diagnosis you will meet with a general surgeon to discuss your options.

Always bring someone with you to the surgeon's office for moral support and to help listen in case you don't remember things they say (which is very common because you are upset)

One suggested option may be a lumpectomy or partial mastectomy, the other could be a full mastectomy.

In either case you will be shocked and feel like you do not know where to turn or what to do.

Almost all people who hear they have cancer don't hear anything else. It is a devastating diagnosis for anyone and usually you wonder if you are going to die. This is not an unusual thought and you are not alone.

A breast cancer diagnosis is not a death sentence by any means. It takes some time to adjust to the diagnosis because you are scared.

Here are some general guidelines and timelines after your initial diagnosis:

Pre-Surgery

Your surgeon will set a date for surgery to remove the cancer .This will usually happen with a few weeks to a month.

Once you have a surgery date you should contact BODYMED BOUTIQUE in Burlington, ON for you **free** post surgical camisole and comfort pillow. This specially designed camisole will provide comfort and dignity after surgery. The pillow is to provide comfort under your arm at the surgical site. The Camisole has special drain pouches for the surgical drains that you will have in after surgery.

Breast Surgery

After having surgery you may be sent home with one or more drains. The type of drain most commonly used is called a Jackson Pratt .This drain consists of a small plastic reservoir bulb connected to a flexible drainage tube. Its purpose is to remove fluid from the surgical wound through mild suction. The drain may have to stay in place anywhere from 5-14 days after surgery.

The drain pouches on the inside front of the camisole provide a comfortable place to store the small bulbs.

The camisole also offers a “puff” or soft breast form that will give you balance after surgical removal of your breast. If you have had a lumpectomy you may not need this.

The garment has a soft built in shelf bra and is easy get on and can be stepped into as very often if your lymph nodes are removed from your arm on the side of the surgery and it will feel numb and be uncomfortable.

Post-Surgery

Once your surgery is over you will book a follow up appointment in approximately 10 days to get your pathology results and see how you are healing after surgery.

Once you have received your results from the surgeon they will then send all of your information and reports to the nearest Cancer Centre for review.

Cancer Treatment

Your next appointment will come approximately 2-3 weeks later at the cancer centre where you will meet with your oncologist and his nurse/assistant.

The reason it takes a few weeks is because the professional team of oncologists, nurses, radiologist etc. review all of your information and try to agree on a treatment plan designed just for you, your stage of cancer, your age etc .

After your first meeting with your oncologist you will have a much better idea what is going to happen next. If chemotherapy and/or radiation is recommended you should get

your start date. Usually chemo is first and you would start quite quickly, sometimes the following week.