

Overview

Side effects from breast cancer treatments that continue or develop after treatment stops are called long-term side effects. They can be caused by the treatment or the cancer itself. These side effects might be distressing and can interfere with your daily life.

This leaflet outlines some common long-term side effects and their signs and symptoms.

By knowing what to watch out for, you can learn the best way to manage or treat long-term side effects.

It's important to remember that everyone is unique and will react differently to breast cancer and its treatment.

Always speak to your doctor if you experience any changes or symptoms, or if you are unsure about anything.



This leaflet was co-created with the Global Breast Cancer Council (GBCC) and supported by Roche.

References

1. Cancer Treatment Centers of America: <https://www.cancercenter.com/community/blog/2021/06/cancer-fatigue> (Accessed October 2022)
2. Frankel Cardiovascular Center: www.umcvc.org/conditions-treatments/cardiotoxicity (Accessed October 2022)
3. Breastcancer.org: www.breastcancer.org/tips/menopausal/longterm_conc/bone_strength (Accessed October 2022)

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Understanding and coping with the long-term side effects of breast cancer and its treatment

Exhaustion (fatigue)

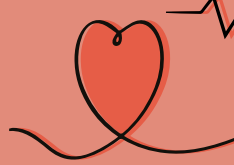


Finding it difficult to gather the energy to go to work, pick up groceries, or even get off the couch? **If you feel extremely tired or weak despite resting, you might have fatigue.** Fatigue is unpredictable and can persist long after treatment.

Beating tiredness

Recognize your limits – rest and wait for the fatigue to pass. Tell your doctor how you're feeling. They can rule out treatable conditions such as anemia (1), or suggest ways to increase your energy levels through gentle movement or relaxation techniques.

Heart problems (cardiotoxicity)



Some breast cancer treatments can cause heart damage, or cardiotoxicity (2). It can develop at any time during or after breast cancer treatment.

It may feel like your heart is fluttering, beating too fast, or skipping a beat. Or you may have pain in your chest, trouble breathing, swollen ankles, or fatigue. If you experience any of these symptoms, talk to your doctor.

Protecting your heart

You should be carefully monitored before, during and after treatment. Tell your doctor if you have a personal or family history of heart problems, such as high blood pressure. You can also learn how to protect your heart, like managing your diet or blood pressure.

Menopause



Premature or early menopause is when menopause symptoms occur earlier than expected. In some cases, the purpose of breast cancer treatment is to stop ovarian function. Or menopause can be a side effect of treatment. **Body temperature changes (night sweats, hot flashes) are common. You may experience physical symptoms (dry skin, urinating more often), or emotional symptoms (sleeplessness, mood swings).**

Making peace with menopause

Digital apps can track symptoms, identify triggers, and provide exercises to ease symptoms. More information on available apps can be found via the app store on your mobile phone or by searching online. A support group or counsellor can suggest ways to cope.

Uncertainty



People diagnosed or living with breast cancer often feel uncertain and fearful. **Whether it's worrying about finances, or wondering whether your cancer might return, spread, or get worse,** it can be extremely distressing.

Living with uncertainty

Understanding the root of your worries can help you find the right support. If you are concerned about treatment or cancer returning, listen to and take care of your body, visit your doctor regularly, and speak up whenever something feels wrong.

Weak bones (bone loss and thinning)



Bones weaken naturally as we age. Some hormonal therapies can lead to bone loss (osteopenia) and bone thinning (osteoporosis) (3). **This can result in fragile bones, increasing your risk of fractures.**

Maintaining strong bones

Regularly monitor your bone health with your doctor, during and after treatment. They might suggest treatments to prevent loss. Talk with your doctor about ways you could incorporate supplements into your diet, and increase your movement through gentle physical activity.

Brain fog (onco-brain)



Brain fog or onco-brain is hard to define as symptoms can vary. **Memory loss, forgetfulness, fogginess, and concentration problems are commonly associated with breast cancer treatment or the cancer itself.**

Clearing the fog

Organisation is key. Write lists, make plans, and use memory aids. Keep a diary to log tricky situations. Record medical appointments or bring a friend/family, so you don't miss or forget information. Puzzles can exercise your brain.