

WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES AND BREAST CANCER TREATMENTS

Every woman diagnosed with breast cancer needs to talk to her doctor (oncologist) when deciding on the best treatment for her. This is especially important for women with disabilities.

There are two general types of breast cancer treatments

- Local therapy--treats a tumor at the site without affecting the rest of the body and may include surgery and radiation; surgery may include removal of the lump, one breast, or both breasts and lymph nodes.
- Systemic therapy--includes drugs to reach cancer cells anywhere in the body. Chemotherapy, hormone therapy, and targeted therapy are systemic therapies.

Speak with your doctor about all your treatment options (types of treatment, pros and cons of each treatment, side effects, how long treatments will last, etc.).

Tips for getting better treatment

- Find out before starting treatment about the accessibility to and within the facility where the treatment will be given.
- Tell staff beforehand about your needs.
- Ask if the staff has experience helping women with disabilities.
- Bring someone to the treatment facility to help you.
- Make sure you understand the “type” of your breast cancer, and the “stage” of your breast cancer.
- Ask for a patient navigator.
- Always ask questions—this is YOUR LIFE!!

The type of disability you have may affect your treatment—here are some situations requiring communication between patient and oncologist to create solutions

- Since she uses her arms a lot, a woman using a wheelchair or walker might find it hard to get around if a total mastectomy (breast removal) weakens her upper body or arms.
- Due to certain physical disabilities, a woman may find it hard to get radiation therapy because she cannot raise her arm or lie still in one position.
- A lack of reliable accessible transportation can make it difficult for someone to complete a full course of chemotherapy or radiation treatment.



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It is also important to have coordination between existing and new health professionals who provide you with healthcare

- To get better care, it would be good for your oncologist to talk to your primary care doctor about your condition. Your primary doctor knows how your disability may affect your treatment.
- Also, make sure your oncologist and the pharmacist (person who prepares and sells drugs) know of all of the medicines you are taking, both for your disability and for breast cancer. They should know this to help prevent drug interactions (when one drug affects the activity of another drug).

You may see many types of health care professionals who assist you in your “breast cancer journey,” such as a

- Primary Doctor
- Oncologist
- Radiologist
- Plastic Surgeon
- Nurse
- Physical Therapist
- Social Worker

It may seem overwhelming, but they are all there to help you get through your treatments successfully.

Chemotherapy drugs may have side effects, or things that happen as a direct result of taking the drugs. Surgery can also result in side effects. Side effects can cause new conditions to arise.

Some people may experience no side effects of chemotherapy, while others may have side effects.

- Please talk with your doctor about possible side effects that might occur and what you can do to reduce their impact.

For more information, please contact Komen Project Coordinator at 301-545-6140 x203 or visit our website at www.aahd.us

This publication was made possible by a 2011-2012 grant from Susan G. Komen for the Cure®



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