



POORTI-04- Telling family and friends about your breast cancer

After diagnosis, telling your family members and friends about the news of your breast cancer can be difficult.

You might feel anxious about their reaction but before you break the news, you need to prepare yourself and take control over your initial feelings. Most ladies clearly remember the first instance they were told that they have breast cancer. It might be helpful to first speak to someone who has been through a similar situation, a breast cancer survivor themselves to help yourself..

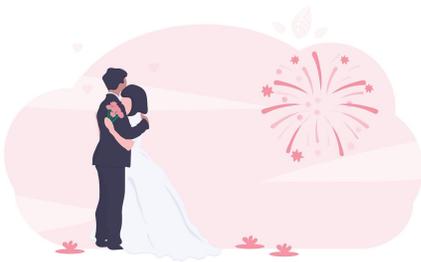
LETTING OTHERS KNOW ABOUT YOUR BREAST CANCER

When and to whom you tell about your breast cancer is a very personal decision. You might want to take some time before you finally confide the news to someone. Having an informed family member or friend with you can give you some emotional support when letting others



know. Mothers become more inclined to their daughters and vice-versa during this phase of their lives.

While letting others know, you may want to start with the symptoms that you faced when you decided to take the tests, and let the conversation flow. In this way, you may also be able to make the members aware of the symptoms from your personal experience. You can always choose to ignore the minute details. You may find it easier to write the same in an email or letter to inform others at a time, rather than repeating the details every time.



TELLING YOUR PARTNER ABOUT YOUR BREAST CANCER

If you are married then your partner is likely to be the most affected during the diagnosis. It's natural for your partner to feel for your health and well-being and be concerned about what will happen over the long term. Since you have a family to take care, you must be accustomed to taking charge of certain responsibilities of the household; but during the diagnosis, you might have special needs and might not be able to take charge of all the responsibilities as you were doing before.

Be clear about your needs in this time-span. You may request him to accompany you to your doctor visits to be able to clear any communication gap. Spend some time together and ask your partner about his needs. Prepare for possible adjustments that might be needed in managing the household. During your diagnosis, there will be times when you cannot help with the household tasks, like taking care of the children, pets, shopping, errands and daily chores.

Prepare yourself and your partner for the possible changes that you might have in your body. Your body may feel and look different, and at times you may feel weak, nauseous, or fatigued. Chemotherapy and some hormonal therapies can cause temporary menopausal symptoms or cause menopause by altering the hormonal balance in your body.



LET YOUR PARENTS KNOW ABOUT YOUR BREAST CANCER

The news can be utterly devastating to your parents. It is a necessary conversation to have but make sure you are cautious when you break the news. Plan the conversation beforehand, you may want your sibling to assist you with this. Be clear about your needs from your parents, and make sure they have understood your condition.



HELP YOUR CHILDREN DEAL WITH THE NEWS

Telling your children that you have breast cancer, can be one of the most difficult things. It's usually best to be open to children, as they can worry even more if they feel you are hiding something from them.



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Some parents avoid telling about cancer to children in the fear of having to answer difficult or uncomfortable questions. But it is better to tell them, as they may find it out in another way.

For most children, it is suggested that the information about your breast cancer comes from either you, or your partner. Depending upon the age and gender of your child, you may want to decide at what stage you want to inform them. Sometimes announcing this to adolescent daughters might seem to be a huge challenge. Keep your child informed about the progress of your treatment, and reassure them that you will get better with time.

Each stage of your treatment and recovery will bring different feelings, anxieties and highs and lows. But if you are able to talk honestly and openly with your child or children at each step, most families can find a great source of support from each other.



INFORM YOUR FRIENDS/ OTHER RELATIVES?

You might have close friends/ relatives with whom you meet daily and it is advisable to let them know about your diagnosis. Plan out the conversation in advance, you can either choose to give them the news in person or over a telephone call.

Some relatives and friends might react with shock, surprise, and even dismay. Keeping the focus on the facts as you know them and the treatment plan going forward may be helpful for each of you.

If you think they can help you in some way, be prompt to let them know.

You may also find yourself overwhelmed with calls from well-wishers, so you might choose to limit yourself from daily communication and concentrate on the treatment.



INFORMING THE PERSONS AT YOUR WORKPLACE

Going through cancer treatment is going to affect your ability to work. If you are involved in a full-time job, you would need to inform your supervisor and arrange for your leaves. Approach them with your medical reports, and discuss about the term of your leave, future diagnosis and follow up schedule. The HR Department would be helpful in filing your leaves. Apart from them, you may choose to inform your closest coworkers, who might help you in need.



ANTICIPATING THE REACTION OF OTHERS



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The reaction of the persons to whom you speak about your breast cancer depends on how close they are to you and their own personal endurance. Some may be upset and worried, some might feel uncomfortable and others may struggle to accept it. How the persons react also depends on whether they were aware of the preface of the symptoms, or they are completely new to the fact. They might look up at their personal experiences of treating serious illnesses or cancer.

Cancer generally has negative associations for most people. The reactions might vary from expression of fear, worry or helplessness to sounding overly positive in an endeavour to make you feel better and battle it out. You may find it helpful to discuss your feelings with close people, rather than hiding your feelings and put up an “all-smiles” face to the world.

It is impossible to predict the reaction of various persons to your breast cancer, but if you are hesitant about initiating the conversation, you can take help from a nurse/ therapist/ social worker/ counselor to help you find the right words.

The gist is that it is much better to express and inform to others than to hold it on - it is just a phase of life. Talking it through would help you and specially those around you who really care for you.

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