



POORTI-05- When your partner gets diagnosed with breast cancer

Knowing that your partner has been diagnosed with breast cancer can be an emotional roller coaster ride for you. Most partners report of mixed emotions, with extreme anxiety about the impact breast cancer might have in your life.

Some might even be scared that their partner might die! It is normal to be concerned about the future of your children and family, but in such tough times, it is better if you can keep your calm, and focus on what can be improved, rather than what might never happen.

The feelings will begin to settle in a while, when you would be more of a guardian to your partner. But if you are still finding it difficult to cope up, you may seek the help of a counsellor. You may find it helpful to speak to the experience team of Poorti.



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SUPPORT YOUR PARTNER AND HER FEELINGS

Most people are shocked to hear that they have been diagnosed with breast cancer. Some also describe feeling frightened, depressed and angry. Why me?, is the most common response of a breast cancer patient. While some feel relieved that the cancer has been diagnosed on time and now it shall be cured. How your partner might feel may depends on factors like their personality, cultural background, how prepared they were for such a news, and any previous experience of breast cancer in close relation.

Some people feel that they must put up a brave face for the well-being of their family, become their pillar of strength. Others share their feelings with therapists and family members, and draw strength from them.

Sometimes, you and your partner may have similar feelings, sometimes your feelings may differ completely. Expect times to be difficult but make sure you stay with each other throughout the journey.



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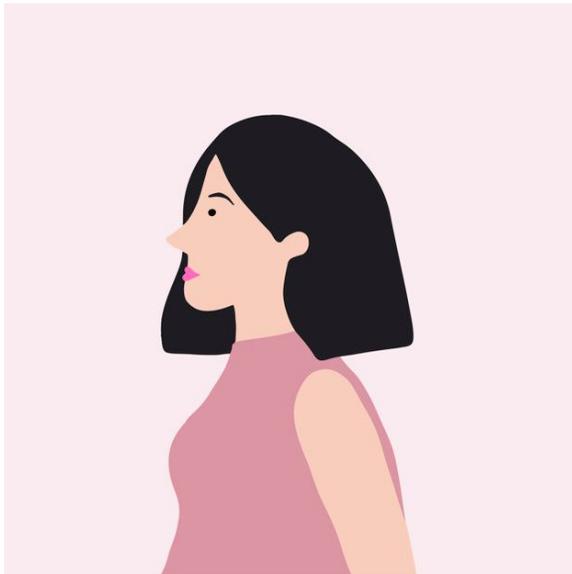


GATHERING INFORMATION ABOUT BREAST CANCER

On one hand, while you and your partner are coming to terms with the emotional crisis, and on the other, you will be overwhelmed by chunks of information from the different diagnostic tests, treatments and their side effects. You might feel flooded with information and opinions at some point of time.

How involved you want to be is completely yours and your partner's call. Some people go proactive and gather as much information as possible through booklets, videos, discussions and testimonials, while others prefer to stay laid back and take up things as it comes to them. Different partners choose different ways to accept the information. As a partner, you must be aware of the figures indicated in your reports and their significance. Remember it is on the basis of these that the treatment is being done.

It is also a good idea to discuss with your partner as to how much they wish for your involvement through this journey. Be prepared to step up and become a caregiver through the physical, psychological, and emotional challenges.



COPING UP WITH THE PHYSICAL & EMOTIONAL CHANGES

AFTER SURGERY:

Surgery of breasts due to breast cancer will affect the appearance of your partner. It may cause loss of one or both breasts, and sensation. How you prepare for these changes as a couple is a very personal choice. You may wish to speak to couples who have been through this journey, or look at photographs that depict the scars caused by breast cancer.

Immediately after surgery/ mastectomy, the breasts would look bruised, swollen and scarred. With time, these would reduce and you will begin to adjust with the appearance of your breast area. At this point of time, most women feel that they might not be as attractive to their partner anymore, and this would affect their conjugal life and intimacy .

HAIR LOSS:

Most patients will lose some or all of their hair during the treatment. This can mean losing body hair, eyebrows and eyelashes. This can be very distressing for some people. Hair loss caused by chemotherapy is generally temporary and hair grows back to normal once the treatment is over. During this period, your partner might choose to wear a hair wig, hat or scarf to conceal the hair loss.

FATIGUE:



A common side effect of chemotherapy is extreme exhaustion or tiredness, seen in almost all persons undergoing the treatment. This may last for months after the treatment is complete. Your partner may have no energy to complete even simple everyday tasks on days. If you are working outside, or need to go out of your house often, this is the time you may request your relatives or friends to stay with your partner and offer support in household tasks.

MENOPAUSAL SYMPTOMS:

Breast cancer treatments like chemotherapy or hormone suppression therapy can cause menopausal symptoms. Changes to sex hormone levels in the body are the reason for this. Menopausal symptoms include hot flashes, night sweats, vaginal dryness, weight gain, mood swings and loss of intimacy.

These symptoms may cause your partner to feel low and lose confidence in oneself. This is the time you should encourage them to speak to you and listen to them patiently, while you decide what can be the best possible way to help.



SUPPORTING YOUR PARTNER.

Knowing the needs of your partner can be difficult at this time. The best way to support your partner during this phase is effective communication.



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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.

LISTENING TO YOUR PARTNER:

It can be difficult to remain patient and listen to your partner if she is feeling very low. You may feel the urge to move the conversation to a lighter topic. However, you should try listening to them as a friend, without the feeling of having to “fix it”. Avoid distractions like turning on the television, cutting the conversation by using mobile phones or talking while your partner is talking. Listen to your partner and help her feel better.

COMMUNICATING YOUR LOVE IN OTHER WAYS:

If your partner is more of an introvert, you may talk to them; or express your affection with simple gestures like a hug, kiss or head massage. This gives both of you a sense of togetherness and helps you cope up with the stress. You may also feel like surprising your partner by doing simple household tasks like cleaning up the kitchen or preparing breakfast for children to surprise your partner.

ATTENDING APPOINTMENTS:

Try accompanying your partner for hospital sessions or doctor appointments. In case you are working, it may be hard to find time for attending them. Create a detailed schedule of the treatment sessions and discuss it with your employer to figure out how efficiently you can manage your office schedule and clinical appointments.

OFFER PRACTICAL SUPPORT:

In general, most people tend to carry on with their regular lifestyle after treatment, but post treatment fatigue can be a major factor in determining how much they can work daily. Offer support in shopping, cleaning the house, gardening or washing clothes and utensils. This shall make things easier for your partner. Ask her if she needs any other kind of practical help. You might involve your friends and other family members to assist you and your partner as well.



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LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF:

To be there for your partner, you need to take care of yourself too. Make sure to take care of your own help. Eat properly, stay hydrated, exercise regularly and maintain a healthy sleep regime.

While supporting your partner, ensure that also find some time for yourself. This can mean going out for a walk, taking some time out with friends or writing something in your personal diary.

In case you are feeling lonely or pressurized at this point, you may speak with someone who has undergone this kind of a situation themselves. Various breast cancer organizations provide support and care in such situations.



LIFE AFTER TREATMENT

The treatment for breast varies from person to person. The time taken to recover also varies. Chemotherapy can last for a few days while hormone therapy can be continued for years. After the diagnosis is done, do not dwell on the fear that the cancer might come back or the reduced efficiency of your partner. Rather, move forward in life with a positive thought and be each others' strength and friend in need.

This phase shall make your relationship stronger and prosper in the face of adversity.

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