



RETURN OF BREAST CANCER

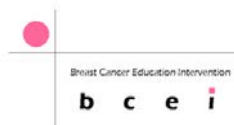
Many women who have had breast cancer wonder what the future may hold. Not knowing what is ahead for them is linked to fears and stress over the future. Women describe that every ache and pain makes them feel as if their disease is coming back or getting worse.

Because women have many questions about the return of breast cancer, this Tip sheet was written to give you the facts so that you will know more about breast cancer coming back. You should always let your doctor know if you notice any changes in your breast or chest area. Remember, you are doing everything that you can by keeping up with appointments, taking medications as prescribed, and staying healthy!

There are three areas where the cancer can return:

- 1. Local:** This means that the cancer may come back in the same breast. If this happens, it might be that the skin or tissue seems thicker in the scar area, breast area, or collarbone. It may also look or feel like a lump or mass.
- 2. Regional:** This means that the cancer may come back in the skin, soft tissue of the chest wall, and under the arm.
- 3. Distant:** This means that the cancer may come back in other parts of the body, like the bones, lungs, liver or brain. You may have heard the term metastasis used for this kind of return of cancer.

There are treatments that can be used for breast cancer, if it returns. Many times, they are similar to what you experienced when you were diagnosed previously. The goal of treating cancer that has come back is to slow or stop the disease, extend life, and keep the quality of life. Many of the treatments are new and are being used with other treatments that have been used for years. Because of this there is a lot of reason to have hope, even if cancer has come back.



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- ***Radiation therapy*** may be used as local treatment to the chest wall if the cancer returns. It involves the use of high-energy x-rays to a local site and is often used with chemotherapy.
- ***Chemotherapy drugs*** that are taken either by mouth or in the vein (IV). They may be used if cancer returns and affects more than one area of the body or when cancer spreads to the liver, lung, or central nervous system. Chemotherapy is often used because it goes all through your body and can fight cancer in many areas at one time.
- ***Hormonal therapy*** is treatment that uses a group of drugs called hormones. It is most often used with patients whose breast cancer responds to certain hormones, or that contain certain receptors.

When Do You Need To Seek Help?

It is vital for you to have regular planned check-ups with your doctor. They will work with you to have follow-up blood tests, mammograms, and other tests that are done. Keep a record of your tests. (See the Maintaining Health after Breast Cancer Tip Sheet)

If you are nervous about your cancer coming back, you should talk with others about these concerns. It may be that there is a counselor or support group who can help you with these concerns.

Useful Websites:

- <https://www.cancer.gov/publications/patient-education/when-cancer-returns>
- <http://www.breastcancer.org/research-news/20081006>



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