

# GUIDE

to Navigating Your  
Breast Cancer Journey



[www.cancerwifecancerlife.com](http://www.cancerwifecancerlife.com)

# A Quick Note

Just a reminder that I am not a doctor or any other medical professional. This is a guide based on my own experience.

Think of it as a starting point.

It is something I wish I had had when I started my breast cancer journey to help get organized and get a handle on things, as there are so very many things!

I hope you will find it useful too!



"The ship of my life may or may not be sailing on calm and amiable seas. The challenging days of my existence may or may not be bright and promising. Stormy or sunny days, glorious or lonely nights, I maintain an attitude of gratitude. If I insist on being pessimistic, there is always tomorrow. Today I am blessed."

- Maya Angelou



# General Timeline

**\*Keep in mind that each person is different and so will the treatment protocol.**

1. Finding your breast cancer - Whether you found it yourself or it was by a mammogram screening, there will be another mammogram and/or an ultrasound to confirm it. (For me, this was over three days.)
2. Biopsy - This will likely be done during the ultrasound. (For me, this plus the results were an additional four days.)
3. Surgery - You may or may not have surgery. I met many patients who had surgery AFTER their chemotherapy treatment. I had my surgery before chemotherapy. (My lumpectomy was about three weeks after finding the cancer.)
4. Chemotherapy - You may or may not have chemotherapy. (For me, chemotherapy treatments started about two months after my surgery because I went through fertility preservation.) And chemotherapy was every week for three months.
5. Radiation Treatment - You may or may not have radiation. (Radiation treatment for me started about six weeks after chemotherapy ended.) Radiation is typically every day for a month or so.
6. Ongoing hormone therapy treatment if you have a hormone sensitive breast cancer (Estrogen positive and/or Progesterone positive). This can go on for 5-10 years.



# Things I Wish I Knew Before Breast Cancer Treatment

1. Finding out you have breast cancer is a gut punch. Expect to have a rollercoaster of emotions.
2. Telling people will be shockingly difficult. Have tissues ready.
3. You don't have to decide on a mastectomy right away. And depending on what kind of breast cancer you have, you may even decide not to do chemotherapy or radiation.
4. People will come at you with all kinds of stories about how they had a breast cancer scare. Be ready for well-meaning but somewhat insensitive comments.
5. Get ready to be shirtless a lot, especially if you get radiation treatments. And the room is always freezing!
6. You will forever be told to not have your blood pressure checked or blood drawn on the side where you had lymph nodes removed because you might develop lymphedema.
7. You might not recognize the person in the mirror for a little while. Beyond the baldness, there will likely be skin changes too.
8. You may have to ask for more help than you ever have before. You may have to ask for help with the kids, house cleaning, job cover, etc.
9. You will have ups and downs physically, emotionally, and mentally.
10. You will experience more anxiety than ever. Be mindful and don't let it rob you of living in the present. There's no point in worrying over things you can't control. There's plenty to worry about you CAN control.

# Q's for Your Doctor

- How big is it and where is it?
- Has it spread to the lymph nodes or anywhere else?
- What stage is the cancer?
- What grade is the cancer?
- When can I get genetic testing done?
- What other doctors will I see (surgeon, oncologist, radiologist, plastic surgeon)?
- What is my prognosis? What are my chances of survival?
- What are my treatment options? Will I need surgery, chemotherapy, and/or radiation?
- What are my chances of recurrence?
- Can I get a hair prosthesis prescription (aka wig prescription for insurance)?



"The goal is to live a full, productive life even with all that ambiguity. No matter what happens, whether the cancer flares up again or whether you die, the important thing is that the days that you have had you will have lived."  
- Gilda Radner







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