



BREAST CANCER
AWARENESS

Caring for the Caregivers

Behind many patients battling cancer are caregivers — spouses, family members, and friends — who provide emotional, physical and logistical support.

These caregivers provide physical, emotional and logistical support while often juggling their own personal and professional responsibilities.

In Jessica Baladad's family, 14 women came down with breast cancer. She told PopSugar that, "It wasn't until my own diagnosis that I realized the mental health part is just as important as being there for someone physically at their appointments," she says. "It's important to check in and ask people how they're doing. You may see someone being strong, but you don't know what's in the back of their mind."



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CAREGIVER DEMOGRAPHICS

The National Cancer Institute provides the following data about informal caregivers of people with cancer: 58% are women, 88% cared for a relative, 39% lived with the person they were caring for, 50% reported high emotional stress, 25% reported high financial strain, 50% worked an average of 35 hours per week at a job while also caregiving, 72% helped with medical task, 43% said they needed help to manage physical and emotional stress.

SUPPORTING THE HELPERS

Experts and advocates emphasize the need to support caregivers, who are critical to patients' well-being but frequently face burnout and isolation. Many find the role rewarding but it also comes with significant challenges, including emotional strain, fatigue, financial stress and feelings of isolation.

Supporting a caregiver begins with acknowledgment. A simple "How are you

doing?" can go a long way. Friends and family can offer to help with errands, prepare meals, or provide respite care so the caregiver can take a break.

Health care providers can help by including caregivers in discussions, offering education and directing them to resources like support groups or counseling. Many cancer centers offer caregiver-specific programs that focus on mental health, stress management and community connection.

SELF-CARE

Self-care is also key. Caregivers are encouraged to take time for themselves, maintain hobbies, get regular exercise and accept help when offered. It's not selfish; it's necessary.

Technology can provide additional support. Scheduling apps, virtual support groups and online forums can help caregivers manage tasks and find community.

Local nonprofits and organizations such as CancerCare and the American Cancer

Society offer helplines, financial guidance and emotional support. The National Breast Cancer Foundation has a free Cancer Caregiver Guide that they will email to those who request it.

Caregivers play a crucial role in the breast cancer journey, and their well-being directly affects the person they're caring for.

When caregivers feel supported, they are better able to provide meaningful and sustained care.

Healthy Meal Ideas

A healthy diet supports overall well-being and contributes to managing treatment side effects for breast cancer patients.

Here are some meal ideas focusing on nutrient-dense options.

BREAKFAST

- Dark chocolate cherry overnight oats: A convenient and delicious option packed with antioxidants like flavonoids, potentially offering anti-cancer benefits. Combine oats, cherries, walnuts, chia seeds, cacao and protein powder for added staying power.

- Poached egg and avocado

breakfast salad: A satisfying and nutrient-rich salad incorporating healthy fats, protein and antioxidants.

- Scrambled tofu with greens: A savory and nutrient-dense breakfast option packed with protein and vitamins.

- Smoothie bowl: A refreshing and easy-to-digest option, especially beneficial for those with a sore mouth. Consider a non-citrus based smoothie bowl if needed, or add more liquid to make it drinkable with a straw.

LUNCH AND DINNER

- Mediterranean bowl with salmon: A healthy and flavorful dish featuring a lean protein source (salmon) along with fiber-rich fruits, vegetables and legumes, all part of the cancer-protective Mediterranean diet.

- Lentil and quinoa stew: A hearty and protein-rich option that can be made in large batches for easy meal prep.

- Chicken and rice soup: Easy to digest and comforting, this soup is a good choice for those experiencing nausea.

- Baked chicken pasta: A mildly flavored comfort food option. Consider omitting chili flakes if experiencing mouth sores.

- Garlic grilled shrimp with chili lime quinoa black bean salad: Combines animal and plant-based protein sources for optimal nutritional intake.

- Sheet pan chicken shawarma bowls: A convenient and healthy meal option, packed with protein and vegetables.

- Vegan rainbow peanut noodles: A flavorful vegan dish featuring plant-based protein sources like tofu and peanut butter.

SNACKS

- Peanut butter and jelly chia pudding: A sweet and healthy snack option.

- Almond cherry cacao trail mix: A combination of antioxidants, healthy fats and protein for a quick

energy boost.

- Greek yogurt with fruit and nuts: A good source of protein and probiotics.

- Hard-boiled eggs: A quick and easy source of protein.

- Fruit and nuts: Provides fiber, vitamins and healthy fats.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

Protein is crucial. It helps repair tissues and support the immune system. Sources include lean meats, fish, eggs, dairy, beans, lentils, nuts and soy.

Eat frequent, small meals. This can help ensure adequate nutrient intake and manage treatment-related side effects like nausea.

Embrace fruits and vegetables. Aim for a wide variety of colorful options for their antioxidant and anti-inflammatory benefits.

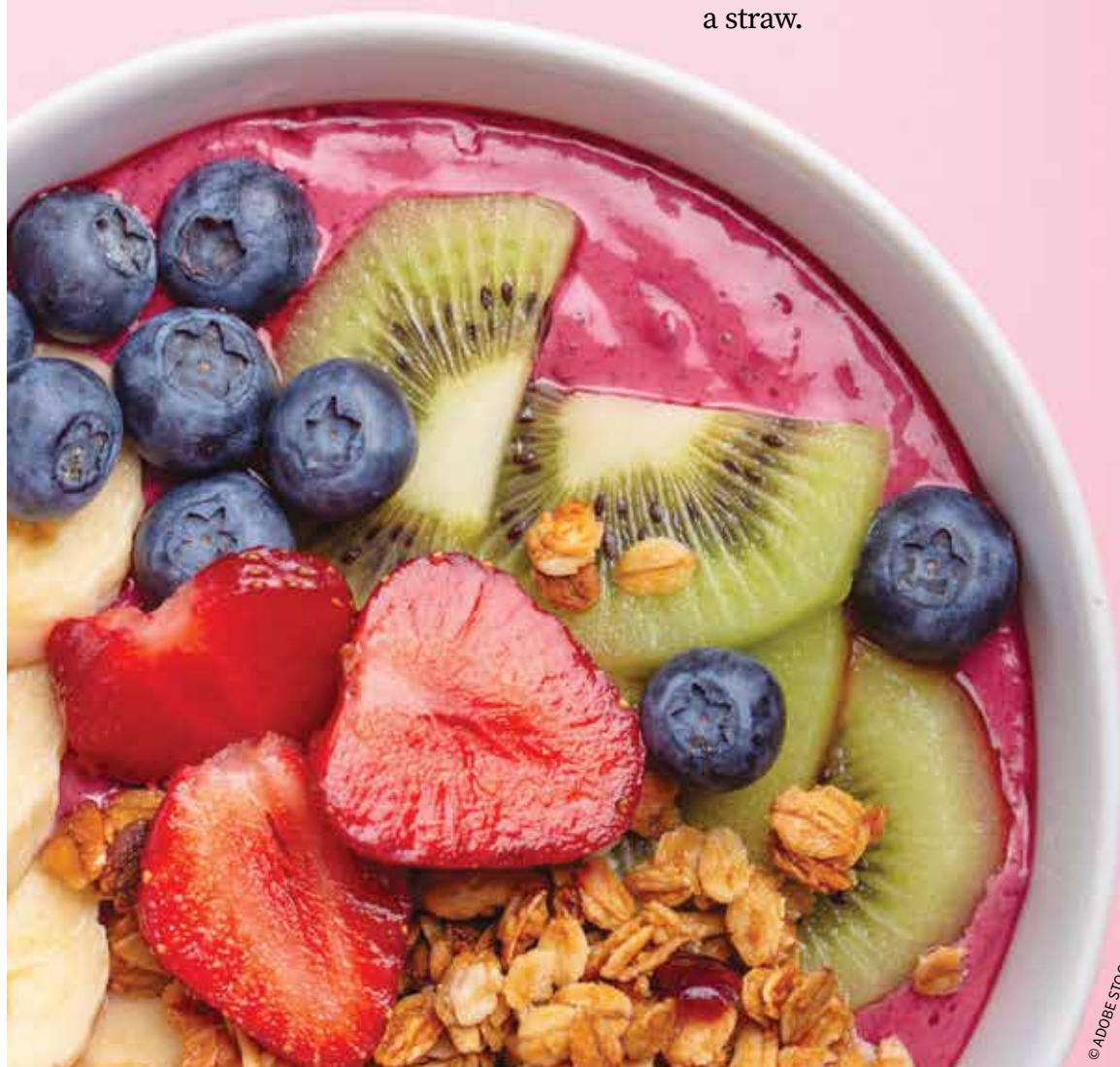
Choose whole grains. They provide fiber and complex carbohydrates for sustained energy.

Healthy fats are important. Focus on sources like olive oil, avocado and nuts.

Stay hydrated. Drink plenty of fluids, especially water.

Consult with a registered dietitian. They can help you develop a personalized meal plan based on your individual needs and treatment.

Remember, there's no single best diet for everyone. Focus on making healthy choices and incorporating foods you enjoy while adhering to your doctor's recommendations.



Targeted Therapies

Recent advances in breast cancer treatment are giving patients more options and more hope than ever before.

Targeted therapies, which are designed to focus on specific traits or weaknesses in cancer cells, are helping doctors treat breast cancer more precisely and with fewer side effects than traditional chemotherapy.

At the 2025 American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) conference, researchers shared exciting updates on several new drugs and treatment combinations that are changing how breast cancer is treated.

One major development involves a drug called inavolisib. When added to standard hormone-blocking treatments (palbociclib and fulvestrant), it helped people with hormone receptor-positive, HER2-negative metastatic breast cancer live longer by an average of seven months while also delaying the need for chemotherapy. Inavolisib works by targeting a specific gene mutation called PIK3CA, which is found in many breast cancers.

Another encouraging update came from the use of antibody-drug conjugates (ADCs), which are special treatments that deliver cancer-fighting drugs directly to tumor cells. One such drug, datopotamab



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deruxtecan (brand name Datroway), was approved in early 2025 for patients with advanced hormone receptor-positive, HER2-negative breast cancer. This drug has been shown to slow cancer growth while causing fewer harsh side effects than standard chemo.

FIGHTING TRIPLE NEGATIVE BREAST CANCER

There are positive developments for patients with triple negative breast cancer, a more

aggressive form that's harder to treat. A drug called sacituzumab govitecan (Tropdelvy) continues to be a leading option, especially for those whose cancer cells carry a marker called Trop-2.

Meanwhile, HER2-targeted treatments are expanding to help more patients. Originally used only for HER2-positive cancer, the drug trastuzumab deruxtecan (T-DXd) is now approved for patients with HER2-low tumors, offering a new option for many people who were previously

considered ineligible for this kind of therapy.

PRECISION MEDICINE

Many of these treatments are part of a growing movement called precision medicine, which matches therapies to the specific genetic makeup of each person's cancer. Simple blood tests, sometimes called liquid biopsies, are making it easier for doctors to identify which mutations are present and choose the most effective treatment.

While targeted therapies can

still cause side effects such as nausea, diarrhea or low blood counts, doctors are finding better ways to manage them so patients can continue treatment with fewer interruptions.

If you're in treatment or managing metastatic breast cancer, talk to your oncologist about whether genetic testing or clinical trials might open the door to one of these newer therapies. With more personalized options emerging, the future of breast cancer care is becoming brighter and more targeted than ever.

Managing Lymphedema

For many breast cancer patients, the end of treatment marks a return to everyday life. But for some, a lingering and sometimes lifelong side effect remains: lymphedema.

Lymphedema is a condition that causes swelling, typically in the arm or hand, and is most commonly the result of damage to or removal of lymph nodes during surgery or radiation therapy. It affects the lymphatic system, which is responsible for draining excess fluid and supporting immune function. When that system is compromised, fluid can build up, leading to persistent swelling and discomfort.

Not all patients develop lymphedema, but the risk increases with certain treatments, especially when lymph nodes are removed or targeted during radiation. It can appear shortly after treatment or even years later. The National Institutes of Health report that about 20% of breast cancer survivors develop lymphedema.

SYMPTOMS AND TREATMENTS

Symptoms of lymphedema may include a feeling of heaviness or tightness in the arm, swelling, reduced range of motion, aching or discomfort,



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and hardening or thickening of the skin. Left untreated, it can lead to complications such as infections or permanent tissue changes.

There is no cure for lymphedema, but it can be managed effectively with early intervention. Patients are encouraged to monitor their bodies and report any unusual swelling or symptoms to their care team.

Treatment typically involves a combination of therapies aimed at reducing fluid buildup and maintaining

mobility. These can include compression garments, lymphatic drainage massage, light exercise and skin care to prevent infection. A specialized physical therapist or lymphedema therapist can provide tailored support and education.

PREVENTION

Preventive measures may reduce the risk or delay the onset of lymphedema. These include avoiding heavy lifting, protecting the skin from cuts

or burns, maintaining a healthy weight and practicing good hygiene. Keeping the affected limb elevated and avoiding tight clothing or jewelry can help.

Many cancer centers now include lymphedema awareness as part of their survivorship programs. Patients who understand the signs and symptoms are better equipped to take early action and avoid long-term complications.

Support groups and

advocacy organizations provide additional resources for those affected. From instructional videos to personalized guidance, patients can access tools that help them maintain their quality of life and independence.

Lymphedema may be a lasting part of the breast cancer journey for some, but with knowledge and proactive care, it can be managed effectively. Awareness, early action and consistent self-care remain the best tools in reducing its effect.

Relationships and Intimacy

A breast cancer diagnosis often triggers a whirlwind of medical appointments, treatments and physical changes.

Amid the turmoil, couples and partners frequently experience shifts in their intimate relationships, affecting emotional connection, physical closeness and the very foundation of love and support.

Many patients report a dip in sexual desire due to fatigue, body image issues and side effects such as vaginal dryness or discomfort. A study published in *Frontiers in Psychology* of metastatic breast cancer patients and their partners found that cumulative treatments — including surgery and early menopause — “amplify sexual changes and challenges,” causing guilt and emotional distress for both patients and partners.

Adding to the strain, partners endure their own burden. Psychosocial research reported by the National Institutes of Health highlights anxieties around sexual intimacy and communication, and describes how the looming perception of a life-limiting diagnosis adds layers of emotional complication.

CONNECTING AND GROWING

Yet more than pain and fear, many relationships discover resilience. A Cancer Center blog notes rebuilding intimacy begins with “patience, understanding and openness,” and suggests gently reconnecting through small acts like holding hands or giving massages before attempting sexual intercourse.

Behavioral-health projections from City of Hope Cancer Center underscore these relational challenges. Alexandra Callahan, a therapist, explains that women often experience abrupt shifts



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in self-image following treatment, including surgical changes, leading them to question whether their partners will still find them attractive. Cynthia Ingram, an intimacy nurse, adds: “Desire can wax and wane because of treatment ... fatigue and exhaustion mean sex isn’t even on their to do list.”

COMMUNICATION AND INTERVENTION

Experts stress communication is key. Open, honest discussions allow couples to reset expectations and express needs without judgement. Health professionals encourage patients and

partners to seek resources such as counseling, sexual-health specialists or support networks that help address both physical and emotional intimacy issues.

Psycho oncology research has found interventions focused on enhancing sexuality and intimacy significantly improve quality of life for both patients and their partners. Programs may include education on managing side effects like vaginal dryness, using lubricants, exploring new forms of touch and scheduling intimate time, not just intercourse.

Reconnecting may involve emotional

intimacy. Post-traumatic growth studies reveal that many survivors and partners emerge with deeper appreciation for life, closer emotional bonds and renewed purpose.

Support services offer opportunities to speak with peers who have faced similar challenges. These connections can normalize experiences and inspire couple-focused healing.

As patients and partners move forward, specialists say growth is possible. With time, patience and mutual support, couples can rebuild intimacy — both physical and emotional — and emerge stronger, together.

Returning to Work

For many breast cancer survivors, finishing treatment is a significant milestone.

The next chapter, returning to work, can present new challenges. Balancing recovery with career demands often requires thoughtful planning, clear communication and personal reflection.

Returning to work after breast cancer is a deeply personal journey. With preparation, support and flexibility, many survivors successfully navigate this next phase, reclaiming not only their careers but a sense of stability and purpose.

Fatigue, brain fog, physical limitations and emotional adjustment are common after treatment. Survivors may need time to rebuild stamina, manage side effects and reestablish routines. For some, the workplace represents a return to normalcy; for others, it brings anxiety about expectations, performance or how colleagues will respond.

CONTROLLING COMMUNICATION

One of the first decisions is whether and how much to disclose. In the U.S., employees are not required to share their medical history with employers, but doing so can help in securing accommodations or adjusting workloads. Many survivors choose to share



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limited details with supervisors or human resources professionals, especially if temporary support is needed.

Breastcancer.org recommends having a return-to-work meeting with colleagues to talk about what responsibilities you are ready to resume and whether you want to talk about breast cancer or your treatments.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Workplace accommodations vary depending on the individual and the job. Common modifications may include flexible hours, reduced workloads, remote work options, additional breaks or a phased return schedule. Under the

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), eligible employees may request reasonable accommodations to help them perform essential duties while recovering.

Energy management is key. Survivors are encouraged to prioritize tasks, build in rest periods and listen to their bodies. While motivation to return to a full workload may be strong, pacing can help prevent burnout and reduce the risk of physical setbacks.

Do what you can to manage workplace stress that can interfere with your recovery. Consider going for a walk or taking a yoga class after work. Have lunch with friends. Take deep breathing breaks.

Some individuals may experience cognitive effects, often referred to as “chemo brain,” which can include forgetfulness or trouble focusing. Organizational tools, written reminders and planning strategies can be helpful in adapting to these changes.

Breastcancer.org recommends that whenever possible, schedule follow-up appointments during lunches or at times that cause the least disruption to the work day.

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Emotionally, returning to work can stir complex feelings. Some survivors report fear of judgment, concern about job security or difficulty

reconnecting with co-workers who may not understand the experience of cancer. Others may discover a shift in priorities or a desire for career change.

Counseling and peer support can help with this transition. Speaking with a therapist, support group or cancer survivorship navigator can provide practical advice and emotional validation.

Many employers offer employee assistance programs (EAPs) or wellness resources that can assist with mental health, stress management and work-life balance. Survivors are encouraged to explore these options as they reintegrate into the workplace.

Managing Fear of Recurrence

For many breast cancer survivors, follow-up appointments are part of ongoing care, intended to detect recurrence early and monitor long-term health.

For some, however, the anticipation of these routine scans triggers a powerful emotional response known as scanxiety.

Scanxiety refers to the stress, fear or anxiety that often arises in the days or weeks leading up to imaging tests such as mammograms, MRIs or CT scans. It can affect both individuals in remission and those living with metastatic disease. While these feelings are common and understandable, they can interfere with daily life, disrupt sleep and affect emotional well-being.

Symptoms of scanxiety may include insomnia, irritability, muscle tension, digestive issues, difficulty focusing and a tendency toward catastrophic thinking. Even after receiving reassuring news from a previous scan, the approach of a new appointment can reignite worries about the possibility of recurrence.

RELIEVING STRESS

Experts recommend several strategies to manage this stress. First, patients are encouraged



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to acknowledge the anxiety rather than suppress it. Understanding that scanxiety is a normal emotional response can help reduce shame or guilt associated with feeling fearful.

Preparation is another key tool. Marking appointments on a calendar and creating a plan for the days surrounding the scan can provide a sense of control. Activities such as walking, journaling, meditation or spending time with supportive friends can help reduce anxiety and ground the mind.

Mindfulness techniques and cognitive behavioral approaches help manage stress. These may include breathing exercises, guided imagery or learning to reframe negative thoughts. Focusing on what is known rather than what is feared can reduce mental spiraling.

INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

Staying informed can help reduce uncertainty. Patients are encouraged to ask their

medical team what the scan will involve, how long it will take, when results will be available and how they will be communicated. Knowing what to expect can reduce surprises and set realistic timelines for when results might arrive.

Support networks are an important part of coping. Many cancer centers and nonprofit organizations offer support groups for survivors, where individuals can share their experiences and hear from others facing similar emotions.

Online communities may provide a sense of connection and understanding.

While the anxiety may never fully disappear, building coping mechanisms can help individuals move forward with greater peace. Scanxiety is a reminder of what survivors have endured, but it can also be an opportunity to practice self-compassion and resilience. With the right tools and support, it becomes one more challenge that can be managed on the path to healing.