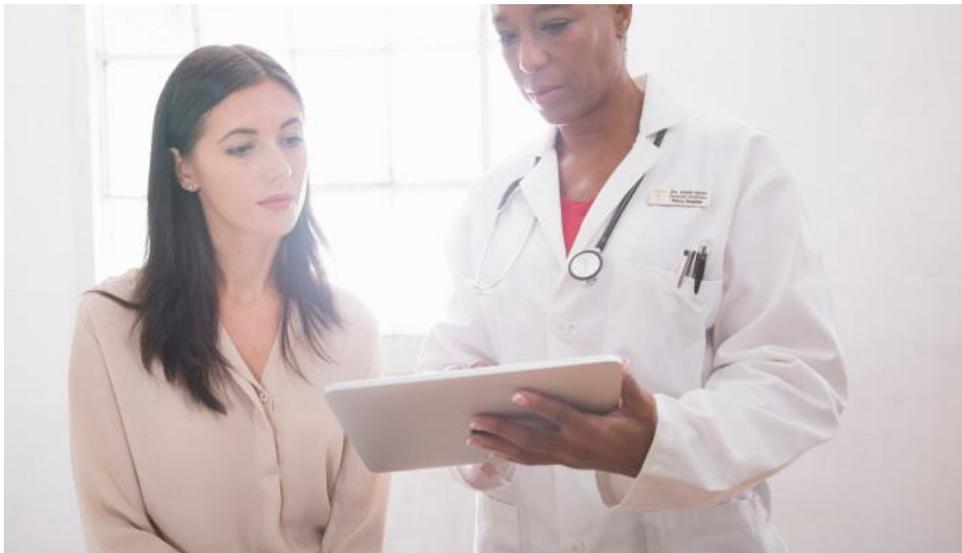


## Diagnosed with breast cancer? 6 things to do

by Bethany Ramos



### **Here's exactly what to do (and what not to do) after a breast cancer diagnosis**

There's no such thing as a "welcome" breast cancer diagnosis, but breast cancer survival rates aren't as grim as they used to be. Considering the fact that more women are diagnosed with breast cancer than any other type of cancer, according to the latest statistics from the Cancer.Net Editorial Board, researchers have been working for decades to come up with some kind of treatment option that actually works.

Out of the estimated 246,660 women in the U.S. who will be diagnosed with invasive breast cancer this year, the average five-year survival rate is 89 percent. "Breast cancer is second only to lung cancer in causes of cancer death among women. It is usually a woman's biggest cancer fear, however," Dr. Kyrin Dunston, MD, FACOG, of Signature Functional Medicine in Atlanta, tells SheKnows.

An initial breast cancer diagnosis can be scary — no doubt about it. But thanks to modern medicine and a growing body of research, there are plenty of options available to you after your doctor has broken the news. Here's how to gather your bearings and start moving forward:

## 1. Take a deep breath

This may seem totally counterintuitive when you just received what is possibly the biggest shock of your life, but Dr. Dunston urges all newly diagnosed women to stay calm. “Know that this is usually just a bump in the road and not the end of the road. That is why breast cancer survivors are plentiful, and most people know at least one,” Dr. Dunston says. The majority of new breast cancer diagnoses involve only one breast (at 61 percent), and 99 percent of these women thrive at five years after diagnosis, Dr. Dunston explains. “Only 5 percent of breast cancers have spread at the time of diagnosis. Although this is more concerning, there are many options for adjuvant treatment that significantly improve long-term outcomes, including radiation, chemotherapy and hormonal therapy.”

## 2. Figure out your options

It may be tempting to turn to Dr. Google and keep yourself up into the wee hours worrying, but Dr. Dunston always recommends that her patients start by getting several opinions from surgeons and oncologists instead. She says, “Also, consider integrative cancer treatments by an appropriately trained medical doctor. Ask lots of questions and take notes. Have your most trusted friend(s) attend visits with you, ask questions and give you objective input when asked.”

**Dr. Gabrielle Francis**, naturopathic doctor and author of *The Rockstar Remedy*, agrees, saying, “My first option for patients is to recommend that they go to The Cancer Treatment Centers of American if there a hospital such as this in their area — they integrate the traditional with the complementary into every patient's program.” Dr. Francis points out that medical treatments that use integrative and complementary therapies can help to reduce the negative side effects of some cancer medicines.

## 3. Trust your intuition

One of the most common reactions to a breast cancer diagnosis is fear — a natural reaction Dr. Vincent Pedre, functional medicine doctor and author of *Happy Gut -- The Cleansing Program to Help You Lose Weight, Gain Energy, and Eliminate Pain*, has seen firsthand. “As a response to that fear of the unknown future that is to come, women can often go into a panic and lose sight of the trust they have innately come to have in their gut feelings.” The best first thing to do is to slow down and trust your gut, Dr. Pedre says. “You think the clock is ticking the minute you find out the diagnosis, but in reality, you can take a pause while deciding what to do. I'm not saying wait six months, but I am saying don't rush off into the first treatment plan a specialist recommends.” Above all, Dr. Pedre recommends seeking the help you need from doctors and going with the plan that feels right in your gut.

## 4. Change your lifestyle

It's always important to listen to advice from your doctor first of all, **as Dr. Francis** highly recommends. But **Dr. Francis** saw firsthand in her residency through Bastyr University at the Biomedical Center Cancer Facility in Mexico, where she learned the utilization of alternative medicines for cancer treatment, that lifestyle changes can make a big difference in both outlook and outcome. "It is essential to go on a whole foods diet and avoid the 3 Ps: Petroleum, Pesticides and Plastic. These are xeno-estrogens and mimic estrogen in the body. They will only make the breast cancer grow. So one must switch to organic and whole foods to change the terrain that allowed the cancer to initiate and proliferate," she says.

## 5. Change your mindset

**Dr. Francis** says that the most positive shift that she sees in her patients is changing the mindset of "Dying from Cancer" to "Living with Cancer." And it starts with the little things — like cultivating joy in your life by doing things you love and spending time with people who are special to you. Regardless of the stage of breast cancer you've been diagnosed with, diseases of all kinds are an opportunity to reassess and restructure habits and lifestyles, **Dr. Francis** says. Along with medical treatment, she advises patients to "look at the process of healing as an opportunity to heal the mind, body and spirit."

## 6. Kick ass

If you really want to know how to make it through breast cancer, you're hearing it straight from a survivor's mouth. Cashmere Nicole, a breast cancer survivor who has been featured on Beyonce.com and is now the CEO of Beauty Bakerie, says that unapologetically taking ownership of the moment was one of the only things that got her through the day. She tells *SheKnows*, "This time of the year five years ago, I wasn't even aware that I had cancerous lumps growing throughout both breasts. Fast forwarding to the moments leading up to my double mastectomy and the moments immediately following it, I can't help but to think about a patient by the name Kelly. She passed away after a courageous breast cancer battle on the day of my surgery. I've done so much in four years after her passing. Things she could have done, yet she won't because she isn't here."

As tough as it was, surviving breast cancer brought some positive changes with it, says Nicole. "I've become so much stronger. I can speak up for myself. I can be free. Breast cancer liberated me."