

# Managing Stress and Anxiety



**LIVING BEYOND  
BREAST CANCER™**



## Dear Friend:

This guide is designed to help you learn methods of self-care to lower the stress and anxiety that can follow a diagnosis of metastatic breast cancer. There are a variety of methods to choose from because what works for you might differ from what works for another person.

Read this guide in whatever order is most helpful. If you want suggestions for actions you can take, turn to section 5. To find out more about stress and metastatic breast cancer, check out sections 1 through 4.

On these pages, you'll also read advice from women with metastatic breast cancer who found ways to lessen anxiety and stress. Their "I've Been There, Too" comments reflect the many methods you can use for your own benefit.

Living Beyond Breast Cancer supports you and hopes the information you find here gives you good options for less stress and more joy every day of your life.

Warmly,

Jean A. Sachs, MSS, MLSP  
Chief Executive Officer

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Tell us what you think of  
*Metastatic Breast Cancer  
Series: Managing Stress  
and Anxiety.*

**Thank you**  
for helping Living Beyond  
Breast Cancer improve our  
programs and services.



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BREAST CANCER™**

Toll-Free Breast Cancer Helpline  
(888) 753-LBBC (5222)  
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All people pictured in this guide are  
LBBC volunteers whose lives have been  
affected by metastatic breast cancer.  
We thank them for sharing their experiences.

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# Metastatic Breast Cancer: Sorting Out Your Thoughts

When you first learn that you have metastatic breast cancer, you are likely to feel all sorts of emotions: shock, disbelief, fear, anger, sadness, worry, depression, grief. Your thoughts and feelings stumble on top of each other as you try to understand what this diagnosis means for you, and you may feel completely overwhelmed. What you may not think about are the many people with the same diagnosis who are active and living full lives.

**Metastatic breast cancer**, also called **advanced** or **stage IV breast cancer**, has spread beyond the breast and **lymph nodes** in your armpit to other parts of your body. There are many medicines for metastatic breast cancer, but this diagnosis means you are likely to be in and out of treatment for the rest of your life.

If you were treated for early-stage breast cancer in the past, your new diagnosis may have happened a few months to many years after initial treatment. The recurrence may be an even bigger surprise if you are years past your diagnosis, because you might have thought you were “all finished” with that.

Or your initial or first (sometimes called **primary**) diagnosis might be metastatic breast cancer. If this is the first time you are dealing with breast cancer, you may know little about cancer or its treatments. Everything might seem to be happening fast.

Be sure to let your doctors and nurses know if you do not fully understand what you have been told. Some providers use medical language that is not well known to most of us.

#### LEARN MORE

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Our brochure, *Metastatic Breast Cancer Series: Guide for the Newly Diagnosed*, explains many of the terms and medical professionals you will encounter. Find it on [LBBC.ORG](http://LBBC.ORG).

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No matter what your situation, your world has changed. With that comes anxiety and stress. You may experience this anxiety and stress as feelings of physical, mental or emotional tension. For example, you may find it very difficult to think about anything but your diagnosis, or you may find yourself crying or unable to sleep well because of your racing thoughts and worries. When prolonged, stress can affect your ability to function in many ways. Stress-filled feelings of dread, fear or unease are a reaction to the anxiety you are feeling.

This guide centers on the many things you can do to manage and reduce the levels of stress and anxiety you may feel. You have many options, and you can choose one or many that make sense for your personality, interests and lifestyle.

#### I'VE BEEN THERE, TOO

The stress issue is important because, for more of us nowadays, we are living longer and forever living under a cloud of cancer.”

—KIM

## No Crystal Balls

It's common to focus on just one question after a diagnosis of metastatic disease: “How long will I live?” Your mortality is no longer an abstract thought but a real issue. That focus lessens as you learn about the treatment options helping people lead longer and more productive lives.

For many, metastatic breast cancer is an ongoing, serious disease that can be controlled through many different types of treatments and monitoring. Although a diagnosis of metastatic breast cancer is not an easy situation, it is possible to have a good life and do the things you want to do into the future.

Taking control of stress and anxiety can help you live fully and enhance your daily life. This is not denying your diagnosis. It is recognizing you can cope with the stresses you face. Remember, you are not a statistic. Your doctor does not have a crystal ball to see the future. You can support yourself by making your quality of life one of your priorities as you go forward.

#### I'VE BEEN THERE, TOO

With early-stage breast cancer, it's a roller coaster — up and down, then you get off. Metastatic breast cancer is more like a merry-go-round: Sometimes you're on the ponies going up and down, sometimes you're sitting on the [ride], but you never get off.”

—JILL

# Stress and Anxiety as Normal Experiences

Everybody's reaction to a stressful event is different. What leads you to feel stressed and anxious may differ from what causes the same feelings in others.

Your stress might be stirred by treatment or side effects, worries about children or other loved ones, uncertainty about the future, financial pressures, feeling isolated, and more. How you react depends on your previous experiences, personality, life situation, support system and other factors.

Feeling stressed and anxious did not cause your recurrence or diagnosis. No research proves a cause-and-effect link between the two. Studies do suggest that high stress can affect your immune system, so taking care of yourself is important.

## I'VE BEEN THERE, TOO

All the effort you make to deal with your stress is a way you are helping fight your cancer. It makes feeling calm and relaxed a way of having control over things.”

—SHERRI

It's normal for the challenges of metastatic breast cancer to bring on stress and anxiety. Remember that you couldn't avoid bad days, emotional upsets and stress completely before your diagnosis, so there is no reason to expect to be able to do so now. Stress and

anxiety are likely to ebb and flow. You may have rough times on and off while also feeling good about yourself, your choices, and the experiences you continue to explore and enjoy.

If you feel overwhelmed by an ongoing sense of sadness or restlessness, you could be experiencing depression, anxiety or both. These can be addressed with professional help (page 38).

## Why Finding Good Solutions Is Important

With metastatic breast cancer, it may seem at times as if some stress or anxiety is always there. You may notice effects on your relationships, home life, work, your participation in treatment and your overall well-being. Trying to reduce how stress and anxiety impact you will help you live better and enjoy your life.

There are many self-care actions to try (page 26) and no one method is right for everyone. Those that work will help you feel more in control. Using them, you may feel less tension, fewer aches and pains, sleep better and have more enjoyment with those you love.

### I'VE BEEN THERE, TOO

I had been a Type A personality and workaholic. With cancer, I knew I had to figure out ways to not be that person anymore, so I started looking at how I responded to stress. My goal is to stay alive. All of the decisions I make are based on that. It's all to create a stress-free life.”

—NANCY



# Understanding Types of Stress

You may feel various types of stress related to living with metastatic breast cancer. Knowing a bit about kinds of stress helps you to be prepared.

## Acute Stress

**Acute stress** is intense and is usually a reaction to a certain event. It may last for only a few days or sometimes for weeks. You may feel acute stress when you first get your diagnosis, or if you learn that a treatment has stopped working.

When you feel acute stress, it may cause you to think of little else than the situation you are facing. Often, this kind of stress subsides once you have a new treatment or other action plan in place.

## Chronic Stress

**Chronic stress** is less intense than acute stress, but it tends to be more continuous. Often, chronic stress results from the ongoing nature of treatment for metastatic breast cancer. The physical evidence of treatment, such as hair loss and fatigue, can be a constant reminder of your health status. Even if you are not currently in treatment, the anxiety around regular scans or doctors' visits can keep you stressed.

Some prescription medicines may promote anxiety, so talk with your providers about nervousness that doesn't go away. Personal, financial and work worries,



as well as fear for the future, can add to feelings of chronic stress.

## Situational Triggers

You may respond to some occasions with stress or anxiety. Among the most common are:

- **Making treatment decisions:** You will have to learn about different therapies. You may want to join a clinical trial
- **Side effects and symptoms:** You may worry about them happening, which ones you can tolerate, whether they can be prevented or lessened or how they might affect your daily activities or independence
- **Scans and other tests:** These happen often and may cause increased anxiety as you wait to hear results
- **Being asked about the breast cancer or when your treatment will be “over”:** You may not want to talk about it, feel intruded upon or want to protect the person asking from certain information
- **News articles or public events:** These may focus on women who have been “cured” of breast cancer, increase feelings of isolation or failure, or keep others from understanding the ongoing nature of metastatic disease
- **Discussion of hospice:** You may feel stressed if this is a difficult subject for you or a loved one
- **Friend’s illness:** Someone you know has disease progression or dies
- **Other stress:** Something stressful happens that is unrelated to breast cancer

No matter what kind of stress you feel, self-care methods can help. Learn about different types on page 26.

### I’VE BEEN THERE, TOO

When the tears come and I’m feeling depressed, I do deep breathing. Find that place in your head and go away to it, let it go. I find that helps.”

—BONNIE



## 10 GIFTS TO GIVE YOURSELF

- 1** Whenever needed, take time to adjust and regroup. Rest or nap.
- 2** Make choices that help your spirit. You may need a walk in the park or a laugh with a friend more than you need to take care of a chore.
- 3** Maintain a regular sleep schedule and habits. Exercise and relaxation techniques can help with insomnia. Talk with your provider if you have persistent sleeplessness or restlessness that interferes with sleep.
- 4** Take your medicine for pain or anxiety as prescribed. Don't feel defeated when you need them. Using these as directed by your provider can support your self-care efforts and quality of life.
- 5** Remember that everyone's medical situation is different and everyone's response — physically and emotionally — to treatment is different. Try not to compare yourself and your condition to anyone else, even someone with the same type of metastatic breast cancer.
- 6** Spend your time with friends and family who help you feel good and provide support.
- 7** Stay focused on the present and be mindful of the things over which you do have control. Think of ways you have

successfully dealt with uncertainty in the past. Sometimes our strengths get lost in our fears.

- 8** Change the radio or TV channel or leave a website if the content disturbs you.
- 9** Take a travel break for a weekend, a week or whatever length works for you. Talk with your providers about adjusting treatment.
- 10** Volunteer. Giving to others can help you get outside your own concerns, expand your social circle, increase your sense of accomplishment and help you feel more balanced. To find out how to volunteer with LBBC, visit [lbcc.org/volunteer](http://lbcc.org/volunteer).



### I'VE BEEN THERE, TOO

I had the wonderful experience of going to a breast cancer retreat. I feel much more relaxed, much more at ease, much more at peace from all the sessions I had there.”

—WILMA

## Coping With Stress in Relationships

You may be afraid to talk about your feelings or fears with friends and family because you think they will become upset or withdraw from you. Yet you might want and even need those conversations.

Rather than assume what others want, ask if they would be OK talking about a tough subject. This helps communication and builds closeness.

Some people might be so uncomfortable talking about your diagnosis that they are unable to provide you with the support you need, even if they really want to help. They might not understand that treatment is ongoing and that how you feel might change from day to day. Explaining to them what you need may help. Be specific. For example: "It would be helpful if, before you plan an activity for us to do, you call and ask me if I'm having a low- or high-energy day."

You might even find that some relationships improve, as old conflicts are set aside and bonds strengthen. It's also possible that some relationships might feel more draining than supportive. You may decide to let those relationships go.

Many people find solutions for relationship stresses by sharing their thoughts in a support group. Reducing relationship stress will help you feel better and can also benefit everyone you love.

Take time to have fun with your loved ones. Close relationships can support you, but they need spiritual oxygen, like laughing and sharing good times

together, to thrive. Surprise children with a trip to the playground or a pillow fight. Enjoy a meal or funny movie with someone you care about. Even just walking in a new place can refresh you all.

## Spouses and Partners

You and your spouse or partner have shared many things. That person is also sharing your experience of living with metastatic breast cancer. Your personalities and the nature of your relationship before your diagnosis will play a role in the stresses you might feel going forward.

Because your treatment is ongoing, it is important to talk about it with your partner. You both may worry about the future you had envisioned together. Side effects, financial and insurance concerns and time off from work increase stress. Your spouse or partner might try to “fix” things by taking charge of your care, or withdraw because of feeling helpless. Sometimes, just talking about these worries builds closeness and feelings of support.

Ask friends for help so your loved one does not always need to drive, clean and shop for groceries. Take advantage of periods when you feel good to have private time for physical closeness or intimacy. Talk to an oncology counselor for help if you feel stress about this, which many people do.

### LEARN MORE

Read our *Guide to Understanding Intimacy and Sexuality* and visit [LBBC.ORG](http://LBBC.ORG) for more information.

Encourage your spouse or partner to build their own network of support. They can find support at cancer centers, nonprofit groups or online.

If your relationship has been rocky, a diagnosis of metastatic breast cancer may add to tensions. Couples counseling may help (page 38). Even if your relationship is good, counseling may help the two of you work out the day-to-day tensions you may feel as a couple facing metastatic breast cancer together.

### I'VE BEEN THERE, TOO

Exercise helped my stress and was a way to really bond with my husband. He would go walking with me, and I think it gave him a feeling that we were really doing something beneficial.”

—SHERRI





## Children

You may feel a lot of anxiety about your children, worrying about how to tell them about your diagnosis and what their reactions might be. Stress can mount as you think about possibly not reaching milestones or not being there for them.

Consider what your children need and what you need. Younger children should be given information appropriate to their age, understanding and emotional makeup (an oncology social worker may help with this). If older children go online, help them find trustworthy information. If you worry about missing milestones, consider creating a keepsake letter, video or gift for a child's life event.

With adult children, you may feel stress from trying to keep your autonomy when they want to step in and take over. When they live at a distance, they may expect frequent updates about your health. Talk with them about what you need and how you can keep them informed. Plan visits that don't include treatments or chores to help you enjoy each other's company and talk about things important to you.

## Parents

You may be all grown up, but when one or both of your parents learn about your diagnosis, they may try to do more for you than you want. This can cause conflict and stress. Establish boundaries by telling them how they can help ("Can you pick up the kids after school on Tuesday?").

If your parents are elderly, your stress might center on who will help them if you become ill. A geriatric care manager can help you and your parents make plans that will reduce everyone's anxiety.

## Friends and Other Family

Some people may rush toward you to help. Others may be fearful or not know what to do, so they stay away. Keep in mind, that retreat is about them, not you. As many people have found, new and unexpected friends may appear.

Let others know that you value their presence without them having to talk or entertain you, especially when you're not feeling well. Tell them that just sitting by your side can ease your stress.

If you are single and live alone, you might not have a ready companion for doctors' visits, practical help or just talking. Even though you probably functioned well on your own before diagnosis, you may be able to keep stress away by opening yourself to friends, family or a support group.

Your circle of friends may include people with metastatic breast cancer. It can be sad and scary if a friend becomes ill or dies. It also may be affirming to see how she made care choices and how others supported her.

## Healthcare Providers

Your healthcare team may add to your stress by not acknowledging or discussing your feelings and experiences. They may seem unaware of the stresses of ongoing treatment and testing. Doctors or others on your team may find it emotionally hard to talk with you about your stresses.

Providers are human too, but you deserve a team that takes a positive attitude about your care and supports your emotional well-being. Choose providers you trust and can feel comfortable with in an ongoing relationship. If your provider seems to be avoiding discussions you want to have, try saying, “I know this is difficult for both of us, but I’d really like to talk about my concerns.”

Sometimes, to gain a treatment option you want, you may choose a doctor whose expertise is first-rate but who isn’t warm as a person. Remember that your healthcare team includes nurses; **oncology social workers**, who are trained to provide emotional support to you and your family and to help you find support services; and others who can provide help.

## Employers and Co-workers

To reduce work-related stress, you may need to educate your employer and co-workers. You decide how much you want to tell co-workers. You do not need to share details of your diagnosis or treatment if you choose not to.

Your supervisor or employer needs to know if you need any work accommodations and what they can do to support you. Speak with your human resources manager to learn what health information you may need to disclose.

It helps for your employer (and co-workers, if you choose) to understand that you may be well for a long time, but you also will be in ongoing treatment. If you want to, discuss reducing work hours or working partially from home. Be sure your health insurance will remain the same if you change your hours.



# Methods of Self-Care to Deal With Stress and Anxiety

Many of the best ways to reduce stress can be done on your own. Select one or a few methods on the next few pages that you think will be most helpful. Some may work better for you than others. The ones you stick with can help you manage overall tension and give you skills to use if you feel heightened stress or anxiety.

## The Big Three

### INFORMATION WHEN YOU WANT IT

Getting answers to questions can help lessen stress and anxiety. Be direct with your healthcare team and loved ones about what you want to know. It's also fine to tell them what you *don't* want to know right then. You may find it helpful to seek a second opinion in order to feel secure about your treatment choices.

To help with the anxiety online research can cause, limit time by searching for a focused topic rather than just browsing. If going online or reading books makes you feel tense or out of control, you can choose not to do so. If you still want the information these resources provide, ask a trusted relative or friend for help.

Many people gain helpful information by hearing or reading about the experiences of others with metastatic breast cancer. But do not assume that what you read on blogs, social media, or listservs is accurate. Comments in these forums are often personal opinions,

and reading wrong information can cause a lot of unnecessary stress. Always ask your doctor or nurse to verify what you read.

No matter where you look for information, make sure it comes from a trusted source. At LBBC, healthcare providers review all our content. For more good resources, see page 41.



## EXERCISE

Being physically active brings benefits, whether you take a walk, shoot a few hoops, dance in a group class or lift light weights. Movement strengthens your body, helps to banish tension and lifts a heavy spirit. Walking, a popular choice, can lessen fatigue. Exercise also lets you meet and connect with others in positive ways that are unrelated to cancer.

People with metastatic breast cancer do all types of exercise, from easy efforts to sports they played before diagnosis to new activities that provide a goal or purpose, such as training and running races. Even if you have **lymphedema**, a side effect that causes swelling, you can do many activities. Check with your lymphedema therapist about what's right for you.

Many women with metastatic disease say that exercise is a key tool they use against stress. It's never too late to start putting more physical activity into your days! Talk with your provider about which types of exercise interest you and find out if there's any medical reason to choose other activities instead.

### I'VE BEEN THERE, TOO

I work out a lot. I take long bike rides and joined a breast cancer dragon boat team. I look at exercise as a way to build myself for what might come in the future.”

—KIM

## GOOD CONNECTIONS

You know who they are: the friends, family, neighbors and co-workers who help you feel better and lower your stress. By now, you also know that not all your relatives or friends fit in this category. You may also have found that your good connections list has grown since your diagnosis to include new people.



These are the folks who really mean it when they ask, “What can I do to help?” Let them assist you by taking on chores, keeping you company when you go to doctors’ appointments or being your regular walk buddy. They may not know what you need or want, so be specific. (“Could you pick up the groceries on this list for me?” “I’d love it if we could see that new comedy movie this weekend. Can you drive?”) They may be happy and pleased that you asked.

Talk with your good connections when you’re feeling stressed, but also let them know when you’d rather talk about non-cancer subjects. Doing so can reassure you that you have a life apart from breast cancer. Discussing your emotions and feelings is important, with the right listener. That could be someone in your personal network, but you might prefer private talks with a professional counselor (page 39).

You may want to expand your circle to include people with a diagnosis similar to yours. Ask your doctors if they treat others who would be willing to talk with you. Look for in-person or online support groups made up of people who share your diagnosis. Contact LBBC’s [Breast Cancer Helpline](#) toll-free at **(888) 753-LBCC (5222)** or via online chat at [lbcc.org/helpline](http://lbcc.org/helpline). We can match you to a woman whose experience is similar to yours.

### I’VE BEEN THERE, TOO

I have Red Hat Society friends [group for fun after 50] and what we do is just relaxing — going to plays, going out to eat ... You just think about living and laughing. I’m not a stage IV person when I’m there.”

—WILMA

## From the Inside Out

### SPIRITUALITY

Many people draw strength from their religious or spiritual beliefs. Prayer and meditation can be powerful antidotes to stress. You might choose to use them on your own or as part of a faith or spiritual community. Talking with a compassionate minister, priest, rabbi, other clergy or spiritual teacher, or with a pastoral care counselor (found in some cancer centers or your place of worship), can support and sustain you.

With a diagnosis of metastatic breast cancer, you may find yourself facing the subject of your own mortality for the first time. Spirituality may help you sort through your thoughts and find a place of emotional balance.

If formal religious or spiritual practice isn’t part of your life, you might want to re-establish calm on tough days by connecting with nature. Time spent outdoors can restore the spirit. Seeing a beautiful beam of sunlight break through the clouds, or smelling the freshness of the woods as you walk often lessens stress and brings a sense of renewal and connection.

### RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

You can learn ways to ease the bodily tension that comes with stress. One method, deep breathing, is very effective and simple to use wherever you are. As you inhale, inflate your abdomen out if you are able to and hold for a few seconds. Then exhale fully, using your abdominal muscles to push out all the breath. (Talk with your doctor first if you had surgery that affects these muscles.) Do a few of these breaths to soothe you when you feel anxious. Breathing techniques taught in yoga, meditation and mindfulness practices (see page 33) also help reduce stress.

Mental imagery and creative visualization help some women to relax and feel more in control. Sit in a quiet place and think about a lovely spot, such as a beach at sunset, or a special place that makes you feel safe and comforted. Go to that place in your mind, feeling the beach breeze on your arms, or sensations you have at that special place. You might think of a healing image, such as a soothing light going to the places where you have cancer.

Massage therapy and other body work may also help. Look for someone trained in working with people affected by cancer.

### **I'VE BEEN THERE, TOO**

**Breathing keeps me calm. That's the No. 1 thing I do to relieve stress."**

—NANCY



## **USING MINDFULNESS TO LOWER STRESS**

**Mindfulness** is a mental practice in which you focus your attention on the natural movement of your breath or an experience in your day. It can help you reconnect with the sources of strength, balance and peace that practitioners of this technique believe are already within you. Through mindfulness skills, you learn to distance yourself from thoughts, emotions and reactions that lead you to feel out of control. Instead, you refocus on simple moments in the present and discover that right now, in this moment, you are actually OK.

Since your diagnosis, you may find your thoughts and emotions circling around fears, negative predictions and sadness. Mindfulness helps you step away from that downward spiral, away from distress. You may feel more capable of coping when you reconnect with what supports you and matters most to you right now.

Many cancer centers offer stress management classes based on mindfulness, which may also be called mindfulness meditation or mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR). Mindfulness can help you live in the present and enjoy the rich fullness of what happens each day.

### **I'VE BEEN THERE, TOO**

**Mindfulness has been an extremely powerful tool. It helps me with staying in the present, not going into the past and not going into the future because I have no control over the future. It helps me center myself."**

—SHERRI

## YOGA

**Yoga** is a set of activities practiced on physical, mental and spiritual levels. Cancer centers often offer yoga courses. You can also find classes in Ys, fitness centers and private studios. If you've never practiced yoga before, it's helpful to learn from a teacher. Begin with gentle-level classes or those designed just for people affected by breast cancer.

### LEARN MORE

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For more information, read our *Guide to Understanding Yoga & Breast Cancer* and visit [LBBC.ORG](http://LBBC.ORG).

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## The Power of Passions

### CREATIVE ARTS

Expressing yourself through art can lift your spirits and release stress. Choose an art you love or want to try: singing, playing music, making a video or film, dancing, acting, painting, crafting. Some people write in journals (private) or online blogs (public). Your writing can be a legacy if you want, telling others what you want them to know either now or later.

You can also lower stress by enjoying concerts, theater and museums. Even listening or viewing the arts at home can relax and calm you.

### LAUGHTER

Putting humor in your life is important, especially when you feel stressed. Laughter brings on the body's relaxation response. It can improve immune function and help you cope. Some cancer centers offer laughter therapy groups to teach how to laugh, on purpose, for no reason. That lets you use the physical action of laughing to harness benefits, no matter what mood you're in.

### I'VE BEEN THERE, TOO

Meditation makes me nuts. Exercise is good, gardening is good. I'm taking an improv comedy class — anything that makes me laugh.”

—SUSANNAH

### PETS

Spending time with pets can calm you by providing routine, diversion, exercise and physical comfort. Pets see you as the person they know. They don't define you by the cancer. It's important to keep your bonds with the pets you love. If you're not feeling well and need help with pet care tasks, ask friends to assist.

## I'VE BEEN THERE, TOO

Going for a walk is very therapeutic for me.”

—ELEANOR

## Safe Places to Talk

### SUPPORT GROUPS

Joining a support group can be helpful for coping with stress and anxiety. Some people enjoy these groups, while others aren't interested or don't find them helpful. You'll find support groups at hospitals, cancer centers, in the community or online (page 41).

When possible, pick a group run by a professional facilitator or moderator (social worker, counselor), even if it is online. This ensures that someone with training will help group members deal with emotions that may arise. Also consider if the group is open (anyone can drop in) or closed (members must be screened to join).

## I'VE BEEN THERE, TOO

For me, the value in an online support group of not feeling so alone with metastatic disease was enormous. I could post any time of day and somebody would read it anywhere in the world and post back.”

—JILL

### ONE-ON-ONE COUNSELING

There are times when you need a good, confidential, knowledgeable listener. A psychological or spiritual counselor may be helpful in addition to or instead of a support group.

It does not mean anything negative about you if you seek counseling. In fact, it is a sign of strength to ask for help when you need it. Private counseling gives you time and space to focus on your specific concerns.

## I'VE BEEN THERE, TOO

You can't be positive and perfect all the time. I give myself a day and cry all I want. Usually I feel much better after that.”

—ELEANOR

In addition to social workers or psychologists, many hospitals have pastoral counselors, or you may have a spiritual counselor at your place of worship.

### LEARN MORE

To learn more about these nonmedical approaches to care, read our *Guide to Understanding Complementary Therapies*.

## I'VE BEEN THERE, TOO

I've learned to listen to my body. If I get up in the morning and my body is not going, I'm not going to push it unless there's a big event.”

—BONNIE



# Finding Help

Many people and groups have experience in handling the stress and anxiety that may arise from living with metastatic breast cancer.

## Professional Counselors

Talking with an oncology clinical social worker, clinical psychologist or counselor who understands the concerns of those affected by metastatic breast cancer can help you manage stress and anxiety. It can be helpful to talk about intense stress with someone outside your close personal circle, someone you don't have to take care of emotionally.

You're not "failing to cope" if you seek counseling services. You are taking control. Seeing a professional can help you lower anxiety and stress, increase your success with self-care methods and help you live each day more fully.

Many cancer centers and hospitals have experienced oncology counselors or can refer you to providers in your community. Your doctor also may have suggestions.

Trained counselors not only help you cope with stressors, but also can tell the difference between the sadness you feel from the life change of metastatic disease and true clinical depression.

Most people start with talk therapy, but if you have depression that affects your ability to function, you may need to take medicine for a while. Your oncologist can refer you to a specialist who understands which

medicines can be taken with cancer treatments. Keep your oncologist informed about any new medications or supplements you add.

### I'VE BEEN THERE, TOO

I started seeing a social worker at a cancer center and that was good. It felt like a place where I could unload and not hold things in. It takes a lot of energy to have those feelings and have to hold them in. My family and friends are very supportive, but there's a limit to what they have to hear about."

—SUSANNAH



## Resources

Here are some organizations, with selected services, that help people affected by metastatic breast cancer.

*Information is current as of December 2015 but may change.*

### **Living Beyond Breast Cancer: Breast Cancer Helpline**

toll-free at **(888) 753-LBCC (5222)** or via online chat at **lbcc.org/helpline**; free brochures and webinars focused on metastatic breast cancer, annual conference

**AdvancedBC.org**: information, support group lists

### **Advanced Breast Cancer Community:**

**advancedbreastcancercommunity.org**; online support community

### **Association of Cancer Online Resources:**

**acor.org**; online support mailing list called CLUB-METS-BC

**BCMets.org**: online discussion list

**BrainMetsBC.org**: information and support for women with brain metastases and their families

**CancerCare**: (800) 813-4673; **cancercare.org**; online and telephone support groups

**Cancer Support Community**: (888) 793-9355; **cancersupportcommunity.org**; online and in-person support groups for women with metastatic breast cancer

**Imerman Angels**: (877) 274-5529; **imermanangels.org**; one-on-one support with someone who has had a similar diagnosis

**Metastatic Breast Cancer Alliance:** [mbcalliance.org](http://mbcalliance.org); an alliance of organizations brought together to advance awareness and education and impact policy and research

**MetaCancer Foundation:** [metacancer.org](http://metacancer.org); online community, support, information and resources

**Metastatic Breast Cancer Network:** (888) 500-0370; [mbcn.org](http://mbcn.org); resources, support group lists

**METAvivor:** (410) 491-5760; [metavivor.org](http://metavivor.org); information on how to start a local support group for women with metastatic breast cancer

**SHARE:** (844) 275-7427; [sharecancersupport.org](http://sharecancersupport.org); helpline, online resources, telephone and New York City-based support groups

**Sharsharet:** (866) 474-2774; [sharsheret.org/how-we-help/women-all-ages/living-advanced-breast-cancer](http://sharsheret.org/how-we-help/women-all-ages/living-advanced-breast-cancer); Resources for the Jewish breast cancer community

**Young Survival Coalition:** (877) 972-1011; [youngsurvival.org](http://youngsurvival.org); forum for young women with metastatic disease, monthly networking calls for women with metastatic breast cancer

## Words to Know

**Acute stress.** Intense feelings that are usually a reaction to a certain event. May last for only a few days or sometimes for weeks.

**Advanced breast cancer.** See **Metastatic breast cancer**.

**Chronic stress.** Feelings that are less intense than acute stress, but that last for longer periods. Often, chronic stress results from the ongoing nature of

treatment for metastatic breast cancer and the physical evidence of treatment, such as hair loss and fatigue.

**Lymph nodes.** Small, round organs that store white blood cells and filter bacteria and waste.

**Lymphedema.** A condition in which extra lymph fluid builds up, causing swelling in tissues under the skin of the hand, arm, breast or torso, on the same side that breast cancer occurs.

**Metastatic breast cancer.** Breast cancer that has spread beyond the breast and lymph nodes in your armpit to other parts of your body. Also called **advanced** or **stage IV breast cancer**.

**Mindfulness.** A mental practice in which you focus your attention on the natural movement of your breath or an experience in your day. Sometimes used to refer to mindfulness meditation or mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR).

**Oncology social workers.** Healthcare professionals who can provide emotional support to you and your family and help you find support services.

**Primary.** A person's initial, or first, breast cancer diagnosis. Metastatic breast cancer can be a primary diagnosis, or it can be diagnosed after treatment for early-stage breast cancer.

**Stage IV breast cancer.** See **Metastatic breast cancer**.

**Yoga.** A set of activities practiced on physical, mental and spiritual levels.

*Many thanks to the individuals who gave their time and expertise for this guide:*

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*We dedicate this guide to the memories of Eleanor Alston, Kim Casamassima, Bonnie Kallen, Sherri West and Susannah Zisk, who contributed to an earlier edition.*



## More Resources

Visit LBBC.ORG or call (855) 807-6386 to order our other *Metastatic Breast Cancer Series* publications:

- Guide for the Newly Diagnosed**
  - Treatment Options for Today and Tomorrow
  - Understanding Palliative Care
  - Understanding Symptoms and Treatment Side Effects
- 

Guides in our *Understanding Series*:

- Guide for the Newly Diagnosed**
  - Clinical Trials
  - Complementary Therapies
  - Fear of Recurrence
  - Financial Concerns
  - Genetics and Family Risk
  - HER2-Positive Breast Cancer
  - Hormonal Therapy
  - Intimacy and Sexuality
  - Lymphedema
  - Treatment Decisions
  - Triple-Negative Breast Cancer
  - Yoga & Breast Cancer
  - Your Emotions
- 

Guides in our *Breast Cancer InFocus Series*:

- Breast Cancer During Pregnancy
- Breast Cancer in Men
- Getting the Care You Need as a Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual Person



This brochure is designed for educational and informational purposes only, as a resource to individuals affected by metastatic breast cancer. The information given is general in nature. For answers to specific healthcare questions and concerns, you should consult your healthcare provider, as treatment for different people varies with individual circumstances. The content is not intended in any way to substitute for professional medical advice or counseling.

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*Supported by a grant from:*

