

# Messages of hope and support



## About us

Breast Cancer Network Australia (BCNA) is the peak organisation for all people affected by breast cancer in Australia. We provide a range of free resources, including the *My Journey Kit* for women with early breast cancer and *Hope & Hurdles* for women with secondary breast cancer. Our free quarterly magazine, *The Beacon*, includes stories from people sharing their experiences, as well as information on a wide range of breast cancer issues. We welcome and celebrate the diversity of our members.

Visit our website [www.bcna.org.au](http://www.bcna.org.au) for more information or to connect with others through BCNA's online network.

Breast Cancer Network Australia (BCNA) represents people with breast cancer across Australia. We spoke to women with breast cancer from many different backgrounds. They want you to know that there is hope and that most women survive breast cancer.



It is natural to feel shocked and scared when you are told you have breast cancer.

Many people worry about whether the cancer will go away, or if it will come back later.

*When the doctor told me I had breast cancer, I went numb. I just stood there and stared at him. When I went home, I just couldn't believe what lay in front of me. – Eleni*

*I had fear. I felt like I was in the dark. It took time, but I came out of it. – Rosa*

*Cancer is not a death sentence – it's not as terrible as you might imagine. Have hope. – Anh*

In Australia, most women survive breast cancer. Treatment for breast cancer is much better now than it was in the past and more and more women are living long and healthy lives after breast cancer. Australia has one of the highest survival rates in the world. For every 10 women who are diagnosed with breast cancer, 9 of them will still be alive after 5 years. Most women recover and the breast cancer does not come back.

*When I was first diagnosed, I had no idea what was going to happen. The encouragement (from doctors) is important, but we might not believe it. Even if the doctor says 'you will be fine', you still find it hard to believe. If there is another woman who you can see who has survived, it helps. Women can give you more confidence. – Hong*

*I thought I was going to die, I was very stressed; I had children and an elderly mother. Talking to other women in my language has helped me a lot. – Lin*

Women have told us that it is very important to be reminded that most women in Australia survive breast cancer. Knowing this might help you to get through the difficult days.

*For me, I would say to women, not give up. To fight it and fight it. To find strength within themselves. If I didn't have this strength, no doctor, no friend, nothing could have helped me. – Carla*

Some women feel scared to tell others about their cancer. This can make them feel alone. Some people may avoid seeing you or talking about the cancer. This could be because they do not understand or are scared. Some people think that cancer can be passed on from one person to another (contagious). This is not true. Cancer cannot be passed on from one person to another. (Cancer is not contagious).

Cancer is not something that people cause themselves. Most of the time we don't know what causes breast cancer. It can be hard not knowing what caused the cancer. We know that the main things that make the chance of getting breast cancer higher are being a woman and getting older. We cannot change these things.

Some women worry that their daughters may get breast cancer in future. It's natural to worry about this. Yet, we know that more than 9 out of 10 breast cancers have nothing to do with family history. If you are worried that breast cancer runs in your family, speak to your doctor about it. If there seems to be a strong history, for example, if you have a number of close relatives on the same side of the family who also have had breast cancer, your doctor may send you to a Family Cancer Centre. There they will:

- ask you about other people in your family who have had breast cancer
- talk about the chances of it running in the family
- speak with you about what you can do next.

In the first weeks of being told you have breast cancer, and during treatment, many women say it is hard to take in a lot of information.

*Because of the fear, you forget half of the information.*

– Kim

When you are ready, speak with your doctor or nurse and ask them to give you the information you need. If you speak a language other than English, you can ask for an interpreter to be at the appointment with you.

It can also be a good idea to take a family member or friend to your appointments to support you. They can ask questions for you and write notes about what the doctors say.

You can also get information from the Cancer Council. They have nurses who can speak with you over the phone. Phone the Cancer Council on **13 11 20** or, if you need an interpreter, call **13 14 50**.

The Cancer Council NSW also has a multilingual website that people from any state can use: [www.cancercouncil.com.au](http://www.cancercouncil.com.au)



While many people turn to family and friends for help during this time, it may be hard to talk about all of your fears, as you may not want to worry them.

*When cancer hits, we think we are going to die.  
But we don't want to talk to our children,  
our families about the fear. – Zafirah*

Many women say that it helps to talk with other women who have had breast cancer.

*So when I had breast cancer I thought that my life was short, I lost everything, but then I think that if you could have a good talk with women who have experience with breast cancer then we can share the experience and we can tell them, 'There is a future, there is some help'. – Hang*

*You can get spiritual and emotional support from people who have been through it but I think the treatment information should come from health professionals. – Sevi*

Many women also say that joining a support group, or speaking with a person who has had breast cancer, can help. The Cancer Council has volunteers who have had breast cancer and who speak English and other languages. The Cancer Council might also have information on support groups near you.

*The most important thing I learnt from the Cancer Council is what cancer is, what will happen during treatment, and what questions to ask your doctor. They also set me up with a volunteer who has been through it. – Mary*

*When we face the diagnosis, we are so scared and confused, our minds are empty ... My sister reminded me to look for a support organisation. I spoke with three other survivors and this helped me enormously. – Xiang*

It is common for women with breast cancer to feel sad some of the time. However, if you feel sad, worried or depressed a lot of the time, talking to a counsellor can help. If you speak a language other than English, there are counsellors who speak your language. You may be able to get some, or all, of the cost of speaking with a counsellor or psychologist back through Medicare. Speak to your doctor or nurse about this.

*Going to counselling really changed my life. I used to have a monkey in my head, going around and around, and the counselling was really marvellous, it really helped. – Gina*

Looking after yourself during and after treatment is very important. You may find you feel tired, even many months after treatment. You may have other symptoms: your hair may fall out or you may feel sick after some chemotherapy treatments for example.

There are many people who will be involved in your care at the hospital where you are having treatment. These may include doctors, nurses, dietitians, social workers and physiotherapists. They can help you manage the physical and emotional effects of having cancer treatment. They can give you information and support and they can tell you where you can get more help.

*Cancer has come. The first period you are in a dark place but then you start to go through it. Concentrate on helping yourself – anything that helps you is good. – Lorenza*



There is no shame in speaking about what you need, and asking for help from family and friends. You may need help with housework or looking after young children. The chance to help you can make your loved ones feel as if they are being useful. Sometimes people turn to their faith for strength.

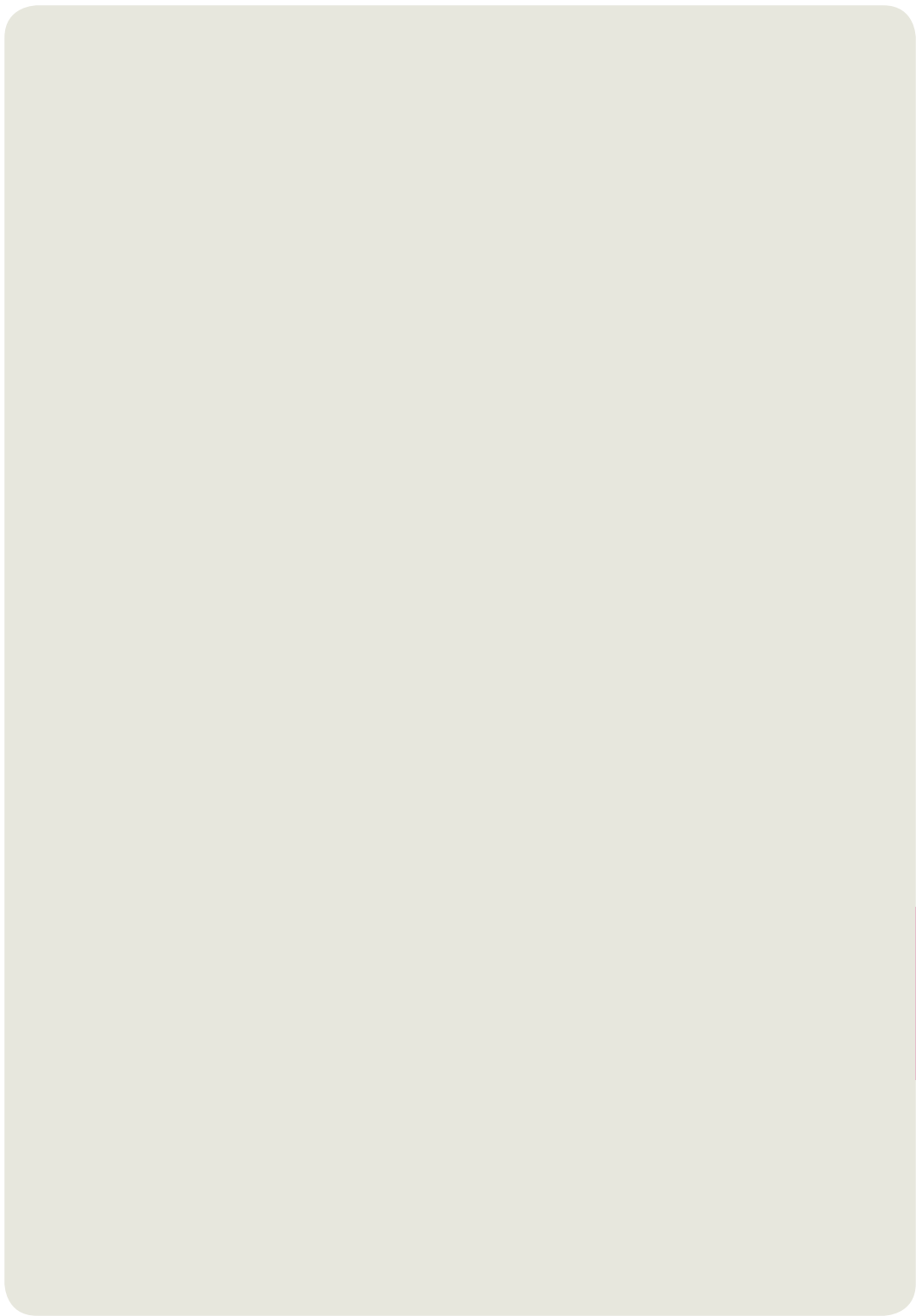
*When I was told I had cancer, I didn't feel scared, I didn't feel sorry – I feel God gave me courage. He helped me to cope. I found strength in me that I didn't know I had.*  
– Sophia

Everyone is different. There is no right or wrong way to cope at this difficult time. Allow yourself to do what feels right for you.

*I am living. I am doing the best I can to make my life the best quality life I can. I am doing it for me.* – Georgia









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## More information

Breast Cancer Network Australia (BCNA) is the peak organisation for Australians affected by breast cancer. We have more information about breast cancer, including some information in other languages, that you can order or download from our website.

Phone BCNA on **1800 500 258**

Visit our website **[www.bcna.org.au](http://www.bcna.org.au)**

If you need an **interpreter**, phone **13 14 50**

