

Once breast cancer treatment ends, most side effects go away over time. Yet, you might have some side effects that occur months or even years after treatment ends. This may also be called late effects of treatment.

Side effects vary for each person. So, it can be hard to plan for or cope with them.

If you're concerned about a sign or symptom (especially if it lasts for more than 2 weeks) or it's impacting your daily life, talk with your doctor. While some of the side effects listed below can't be reversed, most symptoms can be treated.

Side effects (in alphabetical order)

Changes in the breast

The look and feel of your breast/chest area may continue to change during the first 1-2 years after surgery. If you had a [lumpectomy](#), there will be some scarring, numbness and changes in the shape of your breast. If you had a [mastectomy](#), you will be numb across your chest. This numbness doesn't usually go away. You may get some feeling back over time, but it will not be like it was before surgery.

If you had [radiation therapy](#), you may notice firmness or shrinkage of the breast or skin. Your skin may look tan and the skin around the surgical scar may be red in color.

Changes in your mood

Some people can experience emotional distress after breast cancer treatment ends, such as anxiety or [depression](#). These feelings are normal. They should ease with time. Talk with your doctor about how you are doing emotionally. They can refer you to a support group, counselor or other supportive resources.

Cognitive function (“chemo brain” or “cancer brain”)

Some people have [cognitive problems](#) after breast cancer treatment. Symptoms may include mental “foginess” and/or trouble with concentration, memory and multi-tasking. Stress, anxiety, depression and side effects of



some medicines can also affect cognitive function. Most people have mild symptoms, but some have problems that can impact their daily life. Symptoms may last for 1-2 years after treatment or longer. It's important to monitor your symptoms and talk with your doctor about them.

Fatigue and insomnia

[Fatigue and insomnia](#) (sleeping problems) are common. Exercise (even just walking every day) can help with fatigue after breast cancer treatment. Other methods such as acupuncture, mindfulness meditation and keeping a bedtime routine may also help.

Resources

Susan G. Komen®

1-877 GO KOMEN
(1-877-465-6636)
komen.org

Living Beyond Breast Cancer

1-888-753-5222
lbbc.org

Related online resources:

- [Follow-Up Medical Care After Breast Cancer Treatment](#)
- [Lymphedema](#)
- [Sexuality and Intimacy](#)
- [Support After a Breast Cancer Diagnosis](#)

Infertility

Both chemotherapy and hormone therapy can cause irregular periods or can stop periods for good. Both tend to bring on menopause early. If you wish to [have a child](#) after treatment, your doctor or a fertility specialist can discuss the timing of a pregnancy based on your breast cancer treatment.

Loss of bone density

Aromatase inhibitors cause a loss of [bone density](#). This increases the risk of osteoporosis and bone fractures (breaks). If you're taking an aromatase inhibitor, your doctor may monitor your bone density and watch for changes. They may also recommend medication or other methods to help strengthen your bones.

Lymphedema

If you had lymph nodes in the underarm area removed (or treated with radiation therapy), you're at risk of [lymphedema](#). Lymphedema occurs when lymph fluid collects in the arm (or another area such as the hand or chest/breast) causing it to swell. It often occurs within 3 years of breast surgery but can occur years later. Ask your doctor about signs to watch for, treatments and tips to reduce the risk of infection or injury to the arm.

Menopausal symptoms

Hormone therapy may cause [menopausal symptoms](#) such as hot flashes and vaginal dryness. Some chemotherapy drugs can lead to early menopause and menopausal symptoms. Talk with your doctor about what you can do to relieve these side effects.

Nerve pain or numbness (neuropathy)

Some chemotherapy drugs can cause nerve damage. You may feel a burning or shooting [pain](#), or numbness. This tends to occur in your fingers or toes. Most of the time these side effects go away after chemotherapy ends. Sometimes the pain or numbness can persist. Monitor your symptoms and let your doctor know if you have any pain or numbness as it can be treated.

Pain

Aromatase inhibitors may cause [joint and muscle pain](#). Exercise (such as walking, stretching or yoga) may help reduce this pain. Pain from breast cancer treatment usually goes away after treatment ends. If you have pain for longer periods, talk with your doctor.

Sex and intimacy

[Sex and intimacy](#) can be difficult after breast cancer. Hormone therapy may cause a loss of desire and vaginal changes can make sex painful. Changes in your body may affect your sexuality. Talk with your doctor, a mental health provider or counselor. They can often provide treatment and support services.

Weight gain

[Weight gain](#) is a common side effect of chemotherapy. Try to eat a healthy diet and exercise. Seeing a dietician may also help. Having a healthy weight and exercising have been shown to improve survival after breast cancer treatment.

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