

Follow-up Care

Follow-up care after treatment for breast cancer is important. Recovery is different for each woman. Your recovery depends on your treatment, whether the disease has spread, and other factors.

Even when the cancer seems to have been completely removed or destroyed, the disease sometimes returns because undetected cancer cells remained somewhere in the body after treatment. Your doctor will monitor your recovery and check for recurrence of the cancer.

You should report any changes in the treated area or in your other breast to the doctor right away. Tell your doctor about any health problems, such as pain, loss of appetite or weight, changes in menstrual cycles, unusual vaginal bleeding, or blurred vision. Also talk to your doctor about headaches, dizziness, shortness of breath, coughing or hoarseness, backaches, or digestive problems that seem unusual or that don't go away. Such problems may arise months or years after treatment. They may suggest that the cancer has returned, but they can also be symptoms of other health problems. It is important to share your concerns with your doctor so problems can be diagnosed and treated as soon as possible.

Follow-up exams usually include the breasts, chest, neck, and underarm areas. Since you are at risk of getting cancer again, you should have mammograms of your preserved breast and your other breast. You probably will not need a mammogram of a reconstructed breast or if you had a mastectomy without reconstruction. Your doctor may order other imaging procedures or lab tests.

[Facing Forward Series: Life After Cancer Treatment](#) is an NCI booklet for people who have completed their treatment. It answers questions about follow-up care and other concerns. It has tips for making the best use of medical visits. It also suggests ways to talk with the doctor about creating a plan of action for recovery and future health.