

# What comes after surviving breast cancer?

## Know what it takes to prevent recurrence of breast cancer

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Foreign research shows that 95 percent of women with breast cancer survive. When detected early, the chances of surviving for five years is 99 percent. However, the cancer journey does not end when the doctor declares you cancer free. It is a lifelong journey in order to prevent the recurrence or worse, metastasis. This is the growth of cancer cells in other parts of the body that were not initially affected.



While we are not in control of our fate, we are in control of our lifestyle and behavior. Both of which can either reduce or increase our chances of getting breast cancer. According to the World Health Organization, there is a 30 to 50 percent drop in breast cancer cases if we adopt a healthy lifestyle. Among the lifestyle habits, diet and exercise have the greatest impact on the development and progression of breast cancer.

If you are a breast cancer survivor, here are some important things that you should adapt into your lifestyle:

Consume cruciferous vegetables like cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, kale, turnip, mustard, bokchoy, watercress, and Chinese cabbage or wombok. These contain sulforaphane that promotes liver detoxification of excess hormone estrogen. Excess estrogen increases the risk of breast cancer. Furthermore, cruciferous vegetables, specifically, watercress, and Chinese cabbage have high levels of phenethylisothiocyanate or PEITC that can kill cancer stem cells that are difficult to kill with chemotherapy.

Make soy a staple in your diet. Take note, the source must be wholesome and not derived from isolated soy protein and supplements. Choose soybeans, edamame, miso, tofu, and soymilk. One of the side effects of breast cancer treatment is hot flashes. Since soybeans contain the plant hormone phytoestrogen or isoflavone, it helps balance hormones and prevent hot flashes. You won't get the same relief if your source of soy is artificial or chemically derived isoflavone supplements. Moreover, the phytoestrogens bind with estrogen receptors thus preventing cancer cells from attaching to these receptors. Contrary to what some believe, soy does not cause breast cancer. It prevents breast cancer.

Get your protein mostly from plant sources instead of animal meat. It would be best to go meat-free but if you can't, make sure that you have a plant-predominant diet and consume animal products as an occasional treat only. Consume oats, quinoa, black, red, brown rice, adlai, legumes, and other vegetables for your protein source. Vegetarian meals on most days of the week will boost your immune system. Thus, decreasing your risk of cancer recurrence. Plant chemicals or phytonutrients and antioxidants in plant food sources neutralizes toxic chemicals known as free radicals in the body. These free radicals damage cells that cause cancer. Furthermore, plant food sources contain fiber that helps promote a healthy gut. Regular bowel movement will help in the excretion of excess estrogen that is related to breast cancer development.

Watch your body fat percentage. Don't just monitor your weight. It is important to know your body fat and abdominal or visceral fat. These are related to breast cancer development. As we get older, fat cells can produce unwanted estrogen that can cause breast cancer. It is important to not only watch what you eat but also be physically active as you age. Strength training for at least two times a week in combination with moderate cardio exercises (at least 2.5 hours per week) is recommended to help build muscle mass and decrease body fat. Exercise must be part and parcel of your post breast cancer journey.

Get your sweet fix naturally from fresh fruits. Studies have shown that women who eat more fresh fruits have reduced risk of breast cancer. Unfortunately, we tend to prefer desserts and snacks that are laden with refined sugars and fats. Get at least two servings of fresh fruits daily. You will get so much vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, phytochemicals, and fiber without refined sugar and unhealthy fat that will only end up feeding cancer cells. Aim to get restorative sleep for at least seven to eight hours a night. There is a reason why humans were created to sleep every night. We need to rest, recover and repair. If you got cancer in the past, it was because your immune system was compromised. Abusing sleep will just weaken your immune system again and increase your chances of getting cancer again. It must be an intentional effort and decision to fix your schedule and get that much needed snooze. If you have difficulty falling asleep, try to get at least 10 minutes of sun exposure in the morning. Your body will produce the hormone serotonin which aids in the production of the sleep hormone melatonin at night. You can also have a downtime such as avoiding gadgets an hour before bedtime, dimming the lights, getting a warm shower, avoiding large meals and strenuous exercise at least three hours before bedtime.

Nurture your spiritual, emotional, and mental health. Stress is the number one killer and cause of cancer. You may eat well and exercise regularly but if your stress level is sky high, you will still weaken your immune defenses rendering you vulnerable to cancer development or recurrence.

While chances of survival have greatly increased with innovations in medicine, we shouldn't discount the fact that lifestyle is crucial in preventing breast cancer, as well as, it's recurrence. If you are a breast cancer survivor, I hope you will continue in this wellness journey and not switch back to your old lifestyle habits.

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