Helping you manage symptoms and side effects associated with metastatic breast cancer treatment
Whether you’ve just been diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer or have been living with the disease for some time, it helps to know what to expect in terms of side effects from your treatment. Fortunately, there are a number of things you can do to relieve your discomfort and to help you cope with the changes in your body.

In the pages that follow, we’ll discuss common side effects associated with metastatic breast cancer treatment. The side effects may be a result of surgery, chemotherapy, or hormonal treatment. They may also be brought on by natural postmenopausal changes.

This brochure provides information on how some of these side effects may affect you, as well as tips on how to manage them. Keep in mind, it is possible to experience some, none, or all of these side effects. But it is helpful to know as much as possible in order for you to manage possible side effects if they occur.

This list of side effects is not complete and will vary from patient to patient. Please talk to your doctor for more information about symptoms you may be experiencing or for more information.

**Hot flashes**

Hot flashes are one of the most common side effects of hormonal treatment. Hot flashes are associated with the hormonal changes within your body. These changes can be caused by menopause and/or medication, and may also be influenced by lifestyle. You may be able to decrease the severity of or alleviate hot flashes by avoiding certain triggers, including:

- Alcohol
- Spicy food
- Diet pills
- Hot tubs
- Hot showers
- Hot food
- Caffeine
- Hot rooms
- Saunas
- Smoking

Try to keep a record of when your hot flashes occur, what you were eating or doing, or how you were feeling at the time. If you can identify the things that trigger your hot flashes, you’ve taken the first step to keeping them under control.

You can also take certain prescription medicine that not only treat hot flashes, but can also reduce hot flash triggers inside the brain. Be sure to talk to your doctor about which medical option might be best for you.

Many women find that stress is a major trigger for hot flashes. To ease your stress levels, try the following tips:

- Give yourself more time to plan and complete activities
- If you have a busy schedule, give yourself a chance to relax and cool off in between activities.
- Plan your schedule to avoid stressful situations during times of the day when you’re most likely to be in a sweat.

For more information about dealing with hot flashes, you can visit the “All About Hot Flashes” page at www.breastcancer.org.
Joint Symptoms

Some women who are on hormonal therapy may experience joint and muscle pain. Pain in the joints may also come from your treatment, other medical conditions or medications you're taking.

There are various over-the-counter medications, as well as prescription medications that your doctor may prescribe, that may help manage joint symptoms. You may also want to consider strength-building exercises to keep your body strong. Yoga also helps to strengthen and stretch your muscles, a benefit that may reduce pain in the supporting muscles and soft tissues. Joint pain may also respond to massage, heat, and swimming. To help manage joint and muscle pain, talk to your doctor about what option might be best for you.

It is possible some joint and muscle pain can disappear within a few weeks or months as your body adjusts.

Nausea and vomiting

Many women experience nausea and vomiting at some point during the course of metastatic breast cancer treatment. Nausea and vomiting during MBC treatment can be a side effect of:

• Specific cancer treatments, such as chemotherapy
• The use of certain pain medications
• Anxiety

You may consider very mild nausea to be a nuisance, but treatment-related nausea and vomiting can be more bothersome. Fortunately, there are medications that can help control or minimize these symptoms. If you experience nausea and vomiting during your MBC treatment, talk to your doctor about what options may be right for you.

Decrease in bone mass

Maintaining good bone health is an important long-term goal for all women—and especially important for those affected by breast cancer. Some treatments for MBC have been associated with a weakening of the bones, also known as osteoporosis, which is associated with an increased risk of fracture. Additionally, women who are postmenopausal are also at increased risk for osteoporosis.

To monitor your bone health, doctors can give you a bone mineral density (BMD) test to measure the level of calcium in your bones. Because calcium makes your bones strong, this test is a common measure of bone loss and refers to the amount of calcium you have in your bones.

While there is no cure for osteoporosis your doctor may recommend medicines that may prevent and/or treat it.

The impact metastatic breast cancer treatment can have on your bones depends on several factors, including:

• How strong your bones were before you began treatment for MBC
• Which type of metastatic breast cancer treatment(s) you receive
• Your menopausal status: women can lose up to 20% of their bone mass in the 5 to 7 years following menopause
Regardless of age, all women can take the following actions to reduce their risk of osteoporosis:

- Eat a balanced diet rich in calcium and vitamin D
- Engage in weight-bearing exercise, such as walking
- Avoid smoking and excessive alcohol consumption
- Have a BMD test to help your doctor determine if you are at risk for osteoporosis

Hair Loss

You may be concerned that your metastatic breast cancer treatment can cause you to lose your hair. Even if you and your doctor have discussed this possibility, the thought of it can still make you feel uneasy. Here are some things you can do to help prepare for the chance you may lose your hair:

- Ask your doctor or nurse if your cancer therapy will make your hair fall out. If so, find out how soon the hair loss may start to occur and how much hair you should expect to lose
- Cut your hair short before you start treatment. Short hair is easier to style and may help you adjust if you lose your hair
- Use mild shampoos and soft hairbrushes to protect your hair as it starts to thin
- If you plan to wear a wig and want it to match your natural hair color, shop for it before your hair falls out
- Invest in comfortable cotton or terry cloth turbans, scarves, or caps
- Visit www.lookgoodfeelbetter.org for more tips on hair loss help

Weight Gain or Weight Loss

Sometimes, metastatic breast cancer treatment can cause weight changes. Here are some tips to consider as you address weight-related concerns:

- To regain your energy, you may need to supplement your diet with extra protein and calories
- Keep a journal to monitor your weight and eating patterns. The information in your journal can serve as a reminder to discuss any concerns regarding weight gain or loss with your treatment team
- If you have a dietitian or nutritionist on your team ask for specific diet recommendations for your situation
- If you are gaining weight, consult your doctor. He or she may advise you to lower the fat content of your diet and/or to consume fewer calories. Focus on staying healthy during treatment and remember the weight gain is not your fault
- Your doctor may encourage you to start exercising to keep your weight under control and/or to keep up your strength. A regular program of moderate exercise, such as walking or swimming a few times a week, may be beneficial, both during and after cancer treatment

Fatigue

Fatigue brought on by cancer treatments can be physically, emotionally, and mentally draining.

Treatment-related fatigue can have a major impact on many areas of your life. It can affect your daily routine, your relationships, and your general sense of well-being.

You may experience fatigue in the following ways:

- Unlike normal tiredness relieved by rest, exercise, or a good night’s sleep, treatment-related fatigue can leave you feeling “wiped out,” even after getting plenty of rest
- Treatment-related fatigue may make it hard to concentrate or think clearly. As a result, it can dampen your interest in activities that you enjoy
Rest or moderate activity may not relieve your tiredness. The fatigue may be related to anemia, a manageable condition that occurs when your red blood cell count is low.

The key to managing fatigue is to be aware of your energy levels and to pace yourself accordingly. By listening to your body, you may be able to carve out “windows of opportunity” for activities that are important to you. If you experience this side effect, ask your treatment team to evaluate your condition and provide recommendations that may help.

Vaginal Dryness

Vaginal dryness caused by cancer therapy can be uncomfortable. If you are sexually active, this condition may make it more difficult to relax, and as a result, intercourse may not be enjoyable. You may find the following tips to be helpful:

- Use a water-based vaginal lubricant or moisturizer. These products are available without a prescription in many drugstores. Avoid using petroleum jelly, which may increase the risk of vaginal yeast infections.
- Ask your oncology nurse if there are samples for you to try.

Lymphedema

Lymphedema, the build-up of extra lymph fluid in tissues, is a complication that most often occurs as a result of surgery. Because lymphedema may also develop immediately after metastatic breast cancer treatments or can occur many years later, you are always at risk. If fluid from the lymph nodes under your arm does not drain properly, you may experience the following:

- Swelling in your arm and hand
- A tight or heavy feeling in your arm
- Difficulty performing everyday tasks

Managing lymphedema

Lymphedema can be managed in the following ways:

- Elevate the affected arm
- Seek professional massage therapy for the affected arm
- Seek professional physical therapy on the affected arm
- Exercise gently to maintain flexibility and range of motion
- Wear a compression sleeve, which is a special elastic bandage that helps fluid drain from the affected arm

Precautionary steps

Researchers are looking at ways to prevent and treat lymphedema. Until more is known about this disorder, it may be wise to take these precautions:

- Include checking for lymphedema in your regular check-ups
- Report any changes in size, temperature, feeling or condition of your arm to your care team immediately
- Talk to your doctor about how to get to or stay at a healthy weight, as obese women are at increased risk
- Work with a trained professional to develop an exercise program to help regain strength in your arm by starting with a low intensity level and progressing slowly
- Avoid overusing your affected arm and lifting/carrying heavy grocery bags, large purses, or other heavy objects
- Avoid wearing tight clothing, watchbands, or bracelets on the affected arm, as constriction may lead to increased fluid and swelling
- If you are at increased risk for lymphedema, ask your doctor or physical therapist about specially fitted compression garments
- Try to avoid infections by using your unaffected arm for blood tests, injections, vaccinations, or blood pressure checks whenever possible
- Similarly, try to avoid sunburns and/or extreme temperatures; use sunscreen regularly and avoid hot tubs and saunas