

Coping and Healing for the “Strong Black Woman”



You have breast cancer, and you should not be alone on this “trip”.

You will have many emotions dealing with this disease. As you navigate, you may feel your life is out of control and you are uncertain about your future.

Whatever your feelings are, it's OK; this is your body, your life,

your story. Take your time to do what is best for you, get the help you need, and understand each step along the way.

Many women tend to do everything and be everything to all and sometimes it is too much. The truth is we all need some help sometimes (even strong Black women), and it's better when help comes with genuine care, love and trust.

With any life challenge sometimes, our strength is tested in so many ways and with a blow like cancer, it is even harder. Cancer treatments can take a toll on you emotionally, financially and physically. Some of us try to be extra strong, continue our old routine, overwhelmed, yet do not ask for help, do not know how to ask for help or go through our cancer experience isolated from others.

Build your support team of family, friends and support group members. Please don't try to do everything yourself, because you can't as you may not have the energy or time. Ask your employer about available sick leave time, disability coverage and Family Medical Leave.

If you are single and do not have family or close friends to rely on it is very hard to go through this experience alone emotionally and medically. After surgery and with chemotherapy you need help with cooking, driving, grocery shopping, housecleaning and other daily tasks. Also, you must have someone drive you to and from your infusion appointments in case you become sick after a treatment and are involved in an accident if you are driving. Ask the hospital social worker for information about medical transportation agencies, neighbor help groups, online support groups and one-on-one telephone support so you can build your support network.

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Please reach out and let people know what you need. Do not go it alone.

Because of fear and uncertainty, learning how to be strong for ourselves and our loved ones can be quite a burden that you might not be able to handle. Your family, friends, partner, spouse and people that care about you can also be affected by your cancer diagnosis and treatments. They have many concerns and fears they may need to talk about. Sharing with them lets them know you need them, can discuss their concerns and gives them an opportunity to reach out to you. Tell them what you need and how they can help. They also must take time to find support as caregivers as they may be a co-survivor with you through this journey.

Talking with a therapist is very helpful. Ask your doctor for a referral to a professional. Some hospitals have Psychologist Oncologists on staff that can help you through the emotional rollercoaster you experience during and after treatments. With information, patience, time and understanding, everyone will learn how to cope.

However, please understand that some people may be unable to cope with cancer and the issues you will be facing. They may not be of much help and sometimes people will abandon you when you need them most. It will hurt but you must move on to find new and caring friends through church, your job or your support group. The people who will stick with you through the hard times will be there for the good times and everything else between.

Finding connections within your support group is invaluable; members know how you are feeling and understand what you are experiencing. Collect the names and telephone numbers of other support group members and call. When you feel comfortable, make plans with them to visit for lunch, help you with your care needs, go shopping, have a shoulder to cry on, share a movie and popcorn or get together for a “night out with the girls” if you are able.

Remember, you must make your recovery your priority by asking for the support you need so you can be a healthy strong black woman.



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