

Title: Follow-up Care After Breast Cancer

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Abstract: Women who have been treated for Stage I, II, or III breast cancer who are asymptomatic should receive follow-up care consisting of regular doctor's visits and mammograms. Further testing, such as chest x-rays or blood tests, are not appropriate for routine follow-up and do not provide any survivorship benefit.

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FOLLOW-UP CARE AFTER BREAST CANCER: A PATIENT GUIDE

I have had breast cancer...now what?

After treatment, there is a risk the cancer may return, or that a new cancer will develop. Also, depending on the type of treatment you received, you may have risks for short and/or long-term complications. You should follow-up with your cancer specialist or primary care physician on a regular basis, and you may consider monthly self breast examinations.

What kind of follow-up care do I need?

Routine follow-up for most breast cancer survivors who are otherwise healthy consists of regular physical exams and mammography (see right). Your physician may order additional tests if you are noticing problems or if your exam or mammogram is abnormal.

What about routine additional tests?

Physical examination and mammograms are equally as effective as additional tests for following women after breast cancer. Unfortunately, routine additional testing does not prevent recurrence nor prolong survival among women who develop breast cancer again, and for otherwise healthy women these tests may involve unnecessary radiation exposure, invasive procedures, and stress.

Additional Resources:

Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, *After Treatment*: <http://ww5.komen.org/BreastCancer/AfterTreatment.html>
American Cancer Society, *Survivors After Treatment*: http://www.cancer.org/docroot/HOME/srv/srv_0.asp



Routine Follow-up Care Schedule, for women after treatment for Stage I, II, or III breast cancer without continuing problems:

Doctor's visit: Every 3 – 6 months for the first 3 years after finishing treatment, then every 6 – 12 months for the next 2 years, then annually thereafter.

Mammograms: Annually, starting 1 year after initial abnormal mammogram prior to treatment.

If you have questions about the benefits and risks of further testing, or concerns about your risk of getting breast cancer again, be sure to discuss these with your physician.

What should I watch for?

Women noting problems should see their doctor sooner to evaluate for the possibility of breast cancer again. Possible symptoms may include:

- A change in the appearance, size, or shape of either breast.
- New lumps in either breast or armpit.
- Unexplained weight loss, fever, or fatigue.
- Shortness of breath, prolonged coughing or coughing of blood, or wheezing.
- Nausea, vomiting, new headache, or seizures.
- Yellowing of the eyes or skin.
- Bone pain or fracture.
- Women on *Tamoxifen* who have not had their uterus removed should report any abnormal vaginal bleeding.



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