



PREPARING FOR SURGERY AND TREATMENT

Many of our Callers take comfort in the tips experienced Links have to offer. Below is a collection of suggestions from Sharsheret Links that may benefit you throughout your treatment.

Meeting with Your Doctors

- Prepare a list of questions in advance of your appointments. Sharsheret can provide a list of questions on numerous topics such as chemotherapy and surgery to ask your doctors. Links are a great resource for questions as well.
- Bring a notebook or pad to your appointment so that you can take notes while the doctor is speaking. Some find it helpful to designate a family member to take notes instead.
- If you have not yet chosen a surgeon or oncologist, know that you can interview several before making this important decision.

Preparing for Surgery

- Ask your physician for a list of recommended exercises to begin after surgery.
- Discuss any medications or medical equipment you may need after surgery. Fill any prescriptions in advance and stock up on recommended equipment, such as gauze pads or topical creams.
- Purchase any sports bras you may be required to wear after surgery. Bras with hooks are preferable to those you must pull on overhead.
- Purchase loose fitting shirts and pajamas that button in the front. It can be difficult to pull clothes over your head immediately after surgery.
- Consider limiting visitors in the hospitals so that you can recover – NOT entertain.
- Arrange with friends and family for any assistance you might need traveling to and from the hospital, or when you return home – shopping, housekeeping, meal preparation, or babysitting. Some women arrange for a private nurse to attend to their medical needs post-surgery.

Preparing for Reconstructive Surgery

- Consider Sharsheret Links when exploring options in reconstructive surgery. Many of our Links will freely discuss their choices, recuperation, and cosmetics.
- Some women find it helpful to view the results other achieved after reconstructive surgery before making their own decision.
- Purchase loose fitting shirts that button in the front. It can be difficult to pull clothes over your head immediately after surgery.
- Consider limiting visitors in the hospitals so that you can recover – NOT entertain.
- Arrange with friends and family for any assistance you might need traveling to and from the hospital, or when you return home - shopping, housekeeping, meal preparation, or babysitting.

Preparing for Chemotherapy

- Stock up on the foods that have been known to alleviate the metallic after-taste common after certain chemotherapy treatments: pretzels, tart sucking candies, dry crackers, lemonade, tea, and starchy foods such as pasta.
- Ask your doctor about salt-water or baking soda mixtures with which you can rinse to prevent mouth sores. Prepare mixtures in water bottles that you can leave in your bathroom and kitchen for easy rinsing.
- The medications now available for managing side effects have improved considerably. Discuss these with your doctor in advance of your first treatment, and fill any necessary prescriptions in advance.
- Arrange with friends and family for any assistance you might need traveling to and from treatment, or when you return home – shopping, housekeeping, meal preparation, or babysitting.
- If you have had a port inserted, consider wearing a button-down top to treatment.
- Consider bringing the following to treatment: reading materials, snacks, music with headphones, writing material (journal or note cards), video cassettes, a sweater or wrap.
- Rent movies and buy magazines. They are easy entertainment both during and after treatment, when your attention span may be limited.

Preparing for Hair Loss

- Shop for wigs or head coverings in advance. Many local breast cancer organizations can help you locate a wig-maker or stylist in your neighborhood with experience working with women who have cancer.
- Shop with someone who will give you an honest opinion about your appearance. If your mother or best friend is going to cry about your beautiful hair – DON'T take her.
- Look for head coverings that feel soft on the inside.
- Ask the wig-maker or stylist to review the way in which the wig will be secured to your head (e.g., elastic, double-sided tape), and the maintenance required to keep the wig looking fresh.

- Consider cutting your hair short before it begins to fall out. Many women appreciate the time they had to adjust to their changed appearance.

Preparing for Radiation

- Ask your radiation oncologist for a list of recommended exercises during radiation.
- Purchase any topical creams you may need to apply during the course of your treatment.
- Wear clothes that are easy to remove, particularly if you are wearing a wig.

Talking to Friends

- If you feel comfortable, call one or two friends and ask them to spread the word – being diagnosed is difficult enough without having to relive the experience hourly.
- Make a plan about returning phone calls. People will understand if it takes a few days to get back to them.
- Designate a “coordinator,” one friend who is responsible for calling other friends about shopping, cooking, or driving assistance that you may need during treatment.
- If you are comfortable using e-mail, consider e-mailing friends with updates about your treatment at a time that is convenient for you, rather than respond to phone calls from well-intentioned friends who may call at the wrong time.

Addressing the Needs of Children

- Sharsheret’s Symposium, “How Do We Care For Our Children? Issues for Women and Men Facing Breast Cancer,” presented a wealth of information to parents addressing the needs of their children at all stages of diagnosis, treatment, and post-treatment recovery. Visit Sharsheret’s website, www.sharsheret.org, to download a transcript of the Symposium.
- Prepare books and games to occupy your children while you are resting. Set them beside your bed so that you can read or play when you feel ready.
- Consider speaking with your children’s teachers and other important people in their lives before treatment begins. Ask them to alert you to any changes in mood or behavior that may indicate your child is struggling.
- Sharsheret’s website, www.sharsheret.org, includes resources for addressing the needs of children. A list of resources may have been included in this packet as well.

Addressing the Needs of Family Members

- Sharsheret’s website, www.sharsheret.org, includes resources for addressing the needs of a spouse and other family members. A list of resources may have been included in this packet as well.

About Sharsheret

Since the organization's founding in 2001, Sharsheret has received over 7,000 phone calls from those affected by breast cancer, health care professionals, women's organizations, Jewish organizations, and others interested in learning more about the important services Sharsheret provides nationwide.

Sharsheret has developed three core programs in response to the needs of young Jewish women facing breast cancer: **The Link Program**, a peer support network connecting young women newly diagnosed or at high risk of developing breast cancer with others who share similar diagnoses and experiences, **Education and Outreach Programs**, including health care symposia addressing the concerns of young women facing breast cancer, and **Quality of Life Programs**, including the *Busy Box* for young parents facing breast cancer, *Best Face Forward* to address the cosmetic side effects of chemotherapy and radiation treatments, and *Embrace*, a support program for women living with advanced breast cancer.

For more information about Sharsheret and Family Focus, please call Program Director Elana Silber at (866) 474-2774.