



FOR YOUNG WOMEN LIVING WITH METASTATIC BREAST CANCER

Here are some helpful tips on living with metastatic breast cancer based on wisdom from the women in Sharsheret's Embrace program.

Recognize that your circumstances are unique to you. It's tempting to listen to successful or traumatic stories about other women, but understand that you have your own set of circumstances. Imagine sitting in a waiting room where each woman is holding a cardboard box that contains her unique set of variables, such as her age at diagnosis, family history, treatments, and personal background. It's tempting to peek into another's box, but try to keep yourself focused on your distinct circumstances. It may help you feel more centered.

Be your own best advocate. Most doctors understand that you are attending conferences, participating in webinars, and reading the latest research. It's okay to ask your treatment team about the information you discover. It is acceptable to seek a second opinion when making decisions. You are encouraged to speak with your doctors when you are feeling changes in your body. The more information you can provide the doctors, the better care they can offer you.

Build upon your hard earned wisdom. In many cases, cancer is not new to you. You may have experienced treatments and side effects, surprises, and disappointments in relationships the first time around. Try to remember the coping strategies that worked when managing side effects from treatment, relationships, or your emotions, and adjust them to fit your current circumstances.

Pack what you need for each day. When journeying, you may over pack and include things you may need for every contingency. This can weigh you down. Try to only "pack" what is necessary to meet your needs each day. Pack your knowledge and research, emotional resources, and logistical support that you will need to help you make decisions or take action for that day. Tomorrow you get to repack.

Brace for sharp turns. It's common to appreciate the routine of every day, and advanced cancer often throws that routine off course. Brace yourself for changes in treatment, appointments, physical and emotional side effects, and you may find the road a bit easier to manage.

Embrace your emotional experiences. In Driver's Education classes we are told that while our instinct is to step on the brakes when skidding, we should not do so for our own safety. It is important to go with the skid. When overwhelmed with emotion, your instinct may be to stop yourself from feeling. Instead, embrace the emotions. You may find yourself in a place stronger than that from which you started.

Fine-tune your significant relationship. If you are married or in a significant relationship, remember that your partner is also experiencing a range of emotions, taking on additional tasks, and making life changes. Keep the lines of communication open, validate each other's experiences, and problem solve together. Try to be open to new experiences in the relationship. You may be surprised by what you discover about each other.

Note that looks can be deceiving. Some days may feel easy, others are harder. People in your life may not know the difference because on the outside you look the same. You, yourself, may even experience the dissonance. On the days that you are struggling, it's okay to slow down and take a breath. On the flip side, looking at your reflection and seeing that you look the same can also serve as a much needed boost that cancer hasn't completely taken over. It may also be helpful to let people know that sometimes your outside doesn't match your inside so they can shift their interactions with you, as needed.

Trust your instincts. There is a lot of information from experts available to parents living with cancer. Remember that you are the expert when it comes to your own children. Gather information and make decisions that are appropriate for each child. You may feel pressure to make every moment count and to create memories. Most people, when reflecting on their childhoods, don't reminisce about the big moments or the big ticket items. They remember the every day routine that defined their childhoods and their relationships with their mothers. You don't have to work so hard. Just be there for your children with consistency and love.

Understand that friendships are not one-size fits all. It's beneficial to know the strengths and weaknesses of your support system, and when necessary, delegate wisely. It is difficult to imagine that one friend or family member can offer you everything you need. Each member of your support network can assume a different role or take on a specific task, and collectively, they can meet your needs in a way that is most comforting to all.

Stay in your life. When first diagnosed you may imagine everything that will change or the things you may have to give up, such as dating, working, hobbies, or activities. When possible, try to continue to engage in those things that are important to you. If these activities become burdensome, you can make adjustments that better fit your current lifestyle.

Take the pressure off. You may feel pressure to make every moment meaningful. However, this can be a cumbersome task. Perhaps you can change the goal to make every moment comforting or happy. Whether you are engaging in purposeful interactions with family and friends or just kicking back on the sofa and reading a magazine, enjoy the moment.

Empower yourself. You may experience a lack of control over what lies ahead. Find where you can feel empowered, such as estate planning, writing letters or recording videos for your family, or spring cleaning and organizing your home. Develop a strategic plan that includes daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly plans. For example, "Every day, I will ask my family to tell me about their day. Once a week I will meet someone new. Every month, I will see a new movie. Once a year, I will volunteer my time for charity."

Redefine hope. What you hope for changes with time. At one point in time, hope can be for a longer life. At another time, hope can mean lessened pain. For some, hope can mean attending a certain event or hoping to gather your family for a holiday. You can hope to have strength when you are tested the most. The most important takeaway is to always, always hold on to hope, no matter what you are hoping for.



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About Sharsheret

Sharsheret is a national not-for-profit organization supporting young Jewish women and families facing breast cancer at every stage - before, during, and after diagnosis. We help women and families connect to our community in the way that feels most comfortable for them, taking into consideration their stage of life, diagnosis or treatment, as well as their connection to Judaism. We also have specialized programs for women facing ovarian cancer. To learn more about our national programs and services, visit www.sharsheret.org.

Sharsheret's Embrace Program

Sharsheret's Embrace program provides resources and support for all women living with advanced breast cancer.

- One-on-one professional counseling over the phone
- Bi-monthly telephone-based support groups
- Tailored resources for women living with advanced breast cancer or recurrent ovarian cancer

Sharsheret's Thriving Again Program

Sharsheret's Thriving Again program provides resources and support for all women surviving breast cancer.

- Personalized kit includes resources and a survivorship care plan
- Teleconferences and seminars online or by telephone
- One-on-one genetic conversations with a genetic counselor over the phone

Name: _____

E-mail Address: _____

Cell Phone: _____ **Home Phone:** _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

I would like to be contacted about the following programs. Please call me.

- Embrace Program for women living with advanced cancer
- Thriving Again program for survivors