



CARE GUIDELINES

FOR YOUNG WOMEN WITH BREAST CANCER



Rethink Breast Cancer has been offering educational resources and front-line psychosocial and practical support to younger women with breast cancer for over ten years. We have heard first-hand the unique issues that these women face. Some of these challenges include diagnosis during pregnancy, effects of chemotherapy on fertility, risk of menopausal symptoms or osteoporosis, feelings of isolation, questions about sexuality, childcare, relationships, dating, employment and finances.

Health Canada and the Canadian Medical Association have established comprehensive Clinical practice guidelines for the care and treatment of breast cancer and our Provincial Cancer Agencies, the Canadian Association of Nurses in Oncology (CANO) and the Canadian Association of Psychosocial Oncology (CAPO) all have developed excellent Standards of Care. However, our report, *Breast Cancer in Young Women in Canada – A Needs Assessment*, finds that younger women’s needs continue to fall through the cracks.

Rethink Breast Cancer has developed a set of recommended Care Guidelines for Young Women with Breast Cancer to ensure their special needs are addressed (in a timely manner). They serve as a compliment to the guidelines mentioned above.

Rethink Breast Cancer’s care guidelines have been developed in consultation with younger women with breast cancer as well as our professional advisors in oncology, nursing and psychosocial support. They are based on original work by UK specialist breast cancer support charity Breast Cancer Care

www.breastcancercare.org.uk

Because there are relatively few cases of young women with breast cancer, many health professionals have not had contact with a younger patient. We hope these guidelines will be a useful tool for both healthcare professionals and young women dealing with breast cancer.

ARE YOU A YOUNG WOMAN WHO’S BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH BREAST CANCER?

Rethink Breast Cancer’s guidelines provide information about key issues you may want to discuss with your healthcare providers involved in your breast cancer treatment and care. They are recommendations on the kind of information and support to which you should be given access as a younger woman with breast cancer.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information on the issues that may affect young women faced with a breast cancer diagnosis can be found in *BREAST CANCER IN YOUNG WOMEN IN CANADA – A NEEDS ASSESSMENT*.



AS A YOUNG WOMAN WITH BREAST CANCER YOU SHOULD:

- 1 Receive treatment and care from **healthcare professionals who are sensitive to the unique needs** and concerns that you may face as a younger woman with breast cancer.
- 2 **Have a full family history taken as soon as possible** with respect to inherited cancer risk. If appropriate, you should be offered a referral to a genetic specialist for counselling and testing.
- 3 Be given an explanation of the risk of menstrual irregularity or early menopause as a result of some treatments as well as **the potential impact on bone health, sexual health, mental function and body weight and image**. Where appropriate, you should be given support and resources on coping with the physical and emotional impact of an early menopause or the menopausal side effects of treatment.
- 4 Be given a full explanation during initial treatment planning about the **possible impact of treatment on fertility**, including support/resources for contraception and pregnancy after treatment. If appropriate, receive **options for preserving fertility**, including information about the chances of success from fertility treatment and the possible impact of delaying breast cancer treatment by an appropriate specialist.
- 5 **Be offered counselling if you are diagnosed with breast cancer during pregnancy or within a year of giving birth** to help you cope with the impact this has on you and your family. If you have to be treated with chemotherapy during pregnancy you should have access to a specialist with experience in this area.
- 6 Be informed, if needed, about any **community-based resources to help you with childcare arrangements** during your treatment and recovery, or **support services available to help other family members cope**.
- 7 Have the opportunity to discuss some of the complex life decisions you may be facing in **a supportive environment with a skilled counsellor**, especially if you are having difficulty coping with making major life decisions sooner than you expected.
- 8 **Be fully informed about choices around breast reconstruction** - the different options for reconstruction or opting out of reconstruction, risks and the reality of the look and feel of "new breasts."
- 9 Be given, if needed, the opportunity to be put in touch with **community agencies to discuss the financial implications associated with breast cancer**, including employment rights, benefit plans, coping with a loss of income and implications for mortgage and insurance.
- 10 Have the opportunity to be **connected with other young women** who have been diagnosed with breast cancer and be told about long-term sources of support post- treatment.

IF YOU ARE A YOUNG WOMAN WITH BREAST CANCER and are looking for support, resources or community, please get in touch with us at support@rethinkbreastcancer.com or visit us at www.rethinkbreastcancer.com

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Rethink Breast Cancer's mission is to empower young people worldwide who are concerned about and affected by breast cancer. Rethink is the first ever Canadian charity to bring bold, relevant awareness to the 40s and under crowd; foster a new generation of young and influential breast cancer supporters; infuse sass and style into the cause; and, most importantly, respond to the unique needs of young women going through it. By taking a breakthrough approach to all aspects of breast cancer - education, resources, advocacy, community engagement, and fundraising - Rethink is thinking differently about breast cancer.

rethinkbreastcancer.com