

Moving On...

“Life moves on and so should we”

**A COMPREHENSIVE HANDBOOK FOR
UNDERSTANDING BREAST CANCER**

by

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Moving On ...

A Comprehensive Handbook for Understanding Breast Cancer

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DEDICATION

It is with extreme honor and privilege that
I dedicate this humble effort to Baba Gurdev Singh jee
of Gurudwara Nanaksar, Rajinder Nagar, New Delhi
for their blessings and inspiration in this work.

Always encouraging honesty, attachment with divinity, service, humility
and humanity they have always sought good for all "Sarbhat da Bhalla".

With their guidance, the endeavor has been to do good for all; by giving
hope through awareness and testimonies. I hope I have been able to
make a modest and unpretentious contribution through this book.

Rajinder Kaur Saggu

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HARSIMRAT KAUR BADAL
MINISTER OF FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRIES
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FOREWORD

हरसिमरत कौर बादल
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सत्यमेव जयते
FOREWORD



In my personal and professional life, I have witnessed that women have always grown stronger when they stood together in times of extreme distress.

This magnificently written handbook for Breast cancer awareness by Dr. Rajinder Kaur Saggu is an effort to share strength and hope among women.

Breast cancer is a greatly feared disease. This book reassures and inspires women facing diagnosis of breast cancer that it is completely curable and there should be no fear of death. Life can return to normalcy after the treatment. She has provided topics important to the clinical management of breast cancer, rather than standard review articles of broader subjects and explained each and every bit in a simple language.

It yet again shows the strength of women whose fates were tested. The book highlights the hardships of women living with breast cancer and dealing with the treatments. "Moving On" also shares the story of survivors. Reading about each and every one of them made me stronger and showed how important the role of our loved ones is.

I hope the readers, especially people who are fighting to live and get back their beautiful life, also experience the strength and hope that Dr. Saggu shared with her patients. It motivates all of us to believe that life is precious and when God has given another chance, it can be used to the fullest.

(Harsimrat Kaur Badal)

Place: New Delhi

Dated: 25th July, 2019

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

No work, no matter how big or small, comes together with the tremendous inputs of many.

Apart from blessings of Baba Gurdev Singh Jee, I owe a tremendously outstanding debt of gratitude to so many who have contributed in compiling this work.

First of all, with deep emotion, I extend my gratitude to my mother whom I lost recently and my late father, who had been the source of my energy and my existence.

I also express my gratitude to the closest person in my life, my husband Dr Sukhvinder Singh Saggu, who has always understood and contributed to every goal of my life.

Of course, my profound thanks to all the patients who have so kindly and willingly come forward to be a part of this unique work and who enriched my life by allowing me to be a part of their healing process. Specially Anandita Dhawan (Mona) - survivor and a selfless woman, who put her hand up for this cause. She has devoted all her time, energy and emotions towards the completion of this book.

My sincere thanks to Rameet kaur (Roma), a cancer fighter who has helped me in compiling the survivor's stories.

I am also grateful to my friends and well wishers, specially Mr Mukesh Surana who has made the whole process seem very easy to me.

I also express thanks to anyone missed in this acknowledgment and request that it is understood that I genuinely wish to thank everyone involved in whatever manner or capacity. Thank You.!

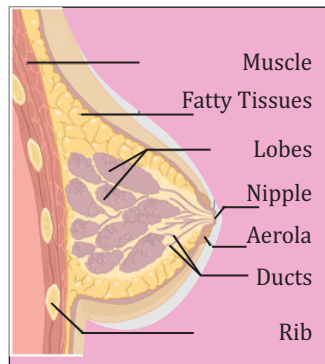
CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS BREAST CANCER ?

A breast is made up of three main parts: lobules, ducts, and fatty tissues. The lobules are the glands that produce milk. The ducts are tubes that carry milk to the nipple. Most breast cancers begin in the ducts or lobules.

Breast cancer is uncontrolled and excessive growth of abnormal cells in the breast due to genetic, hormonal and lifestyle factors.

Although breast cancer predominantly occur in women, it can also affect men. Early detection increases chances of effective treatment and woman may not have to lose their breast.



FACTS ABOUT BREAST CANCER

Breast Cancer is currently the most common cancer in India both in terms of incidence and mortality. It is emerging as a major public health problem.

In India, the age adjusted rate of breast cancer is as high as 25.8 per 100,000 women and mortality is 12.7 per 100,000 women.

More than 50% of patients diagnosed die of breast cancer which is just double the cases in comparison to west. This is due to :-

- Late diagnosis
- Lack of awareness
- Absence of an organised population based screening program
- Lack of high quality infrastructure and trained oncologist in tier 2 and tier 3 cities.

CHAPTER 2

SYMPTOMS OF BREAST CANCER

The most common symptoms of breast cancer are :-

1. Lump in the breast or underarm area.
2. Any change in size or shape of the breast.
3. Nipple discharge other than breast milk .
4. Nipple retraction or inversion.
5. Thickening of the skin of breast.
6. Dimpling of skin or orange peel texture.
7. Any itching, ulceration or erosion of nipple.
8. A red, swollen, warm and scaly skin of breast.

In general, pain in the breast is not normally a sign of breast cancer. Pain is usually hormone related, especially when both breasts are involved. Breast pain is usually present to some degree with inflammatory breast cancer which has other distinct symptoms as well or pain is present in late stages of breast cancer.

In early stages, breast cancer has no signs & symptoms and noticing an unusual changes like these does not necessarily means you will get breast cancer.

However, breast self examination, clinical breast examination and regular mammograms are essential for early detection.

CHAPTER 3

RISK FACTORS OF BREAST CANCER

A risk factor for Breast Cancer is anything that increases your chance of getting Breast Cancer. Having a risk factor does not mean that you will definitely develop Breast Cancer.

Risk Factors you cannot change (Non-modifiable):

- 1. Age:** The chances of breast cancer increase as one gets older.
- 2. Gender:** Compared to men, women are 100 times more at risk of developing breast cancer.
- 3. Family history:** The risk is higher among women who have close relatives with breast cancer diagnosed before menopause. Having relative (sister, mother, grandmother) doubles a woman's risk.
Inherited Genes : About 5 to 10% of breast cancer cases are hereditary, caused by abnormal genes passed from parent to child. Most inherited cancers are associated with mutations in BRCA 1 & BRCA 2.
Acquired Genes : Remaining 90% of breast cancer are due to acquired gene mutation. These genes changes happens over a course of lifetime as a result of natural ageing process or exposure to chemicals in environment. The exact causes are not known.
- 4. Previous history of breast cancer:** If you were treated for breast cancer in one breast, the chances of developing it in the other breast increases.
- 5. Menstruation:** Women who started their menstrual cycle at a younger age (before 12) or went through menopause later (after 52) have a slightly increased risk. This is due to exposure to estrogen for a longer period of time.
- 6. Dense Breast tissue:** Women with dense breast tissue (as documented by mammogram) have a higher risk of breast cancer.

Risk Factors you can change (Modifiable) :

1. Obesity : Women who are overweight or obese after menopause may have an increased risk of breast cancer. This may be because fat cells secrete estrogen, a hormone responsible for breast cancer.

2. Pregnancy : Women who have never been pregnant have a greater risk of breast cancer. Also giving birth to a child after age of 30 increases the risk.

3. Breast-feeding : No Breast-feeding or feeding for less than one year slightly increases the risk of breast cancer.

4. Drinking Alcohol : Women who consume 3 or more alcoholic drinks each week have a 15-20% higher incidence of breast cancer as compared to non drinkers. Excessive alcohol consumption also increases risk of other cancers.

5. Hormone replacement therapy: Women treating to get relief from menopausal symptoms with combined estrogen and progesterone pills have an increased risk of breast cancer. The risk decreases when women stop taking these medications.

6. Lack of Physical Activity: A sedentary lifestyle with little physical activity can increase the risk of breast cancer.

7. Poor Dietary Choices : A diet high in saturated fat and lacking fresh fruits and vegetables can increase the risk for breast cancer. Avoid foods that contain chemicals and excess hormones.

CHAPTER 4

METHODS OF EARLY DETECTION

"An ounce of prevention is worth more than a million pounds of cure."

BREAST SCREENING

A screening test is done routinely for people who appear to be healthy and do not have any signs and symptoms of Breast Cancer.

Although breast cancer screening cannot prevent breast cancer, it can help find breast cancer early, when it is easier to treat. Methods used to screen breast cancer are :-

1. BREAST SELF EXAMINATION (BSE)

Examining your breasts regularly makes you familiar with what is normal for you.

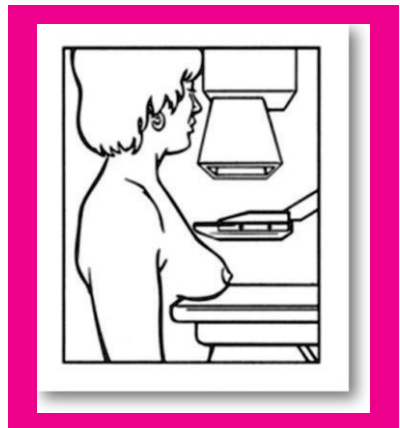
2. CLINICAL BREAST EXAMINATION (CBE)

It is a thorough examination of a breast and underarm area by a doctor or trained healthcare professional. It takes very little time and requires no special equipment. Doctor will discuss the findings of CBE and suggest if further tests are needed or not.

3. SCREENING MAMMOGRAPHY

A Mammogram is simply an X-RAY of the breast using low dose radiation. It can reveal cancer even before it is felt.

The breast is pressed between 2 plates to flatten and spread the tissue. It produces the x-ray picture of breast.



Age Group	Examination	How Frequently
20-45 years	Breast Self Exam	Once a month
	Clinical Breast Exam	Once in 3 years
	Mammogram	Not advised
> 45 years	Breast self exam	Once a month
	Clinical Breast exam	Once a year
	Mamograms	Once a year

Some women are at higher risk of developing Breast Cancer.

The risk factors are :

1. First degree relatives with breast and ovarian cancer.
2. BRCA 1 / BRCA 2 mutation.

Screening for women at higher risk

Your doctor will develop a screening plan tailored to your unique situation. Recommended screening guidelines include:-

1. Breast self examination monthly.
2. Clinical breast examination every 6 monthly.
3. Mammography/Breast MRI every year from age 40 years or earlier.
4. Screening starts 10 years earlier than the age of affected first degree relatives (mother or sister)

Breast Ultrasound

Breast ultrasound plays an important role in evaluating breast lumps.

1. It is complimentary to mammography in detecting breast cancer.
2. It is patient friendly and requires no compression.
3. It is used primarily to differentiate between a cyst and solid mass.
4. Recommended in younger women with dense breast.
5. Screening of pregnant women.

BREAST SELF EXAMINATION

Breast self-examination (BSE) is a simple technique which costs nothing, takes little time, requires no expensive equipments and can be done at your home.

BSE makes you familiar with how your breasts look and feel. Make sure you know what is normal for you. For some women, breasts become enlarged, tender and lumpy just before a period, and then return to normal once the period is over, others may have swollen breasts throughout their cycle.

When to do Breast Self-exam?

1. Once a month, preferably 5-7 days after your periods.
2. If you are pregnant, no longer have periods or your period is irregular, choose a specific day each month.

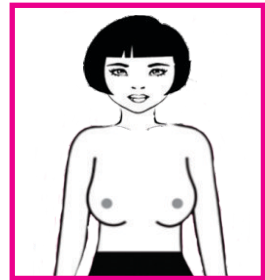
Five Steps to examine your breast are :

STEP 1 : Stand in front of a mirror and look closely at your breasts. Check for the following changes :

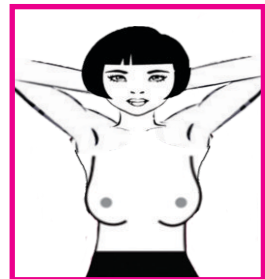
Shape: Compare one to the other. One breast may normally be larger than the other, but sudden changes in size should not occur.

Skin: Check for thickening, redness, dimpling, or orange-peel-textured appearance.

Nipples: Check for any physical changes such as a sudden inversion, itching or discharge.



STEP 2: Now raise your arms and look for the same changes. Look for any dimpling of skin or in-drawing nipple.



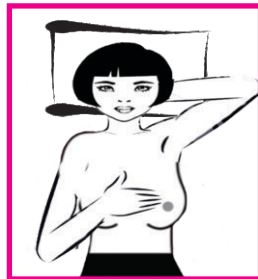
STEP 3: Gently squeeze each nipple between your finger and thumb and notice any discharge. Consult doctor if nipple discharge is yellow fluid or blood.



STEP 4: Feel your breasts in lying down position. Lie down and use your right hand to feel your left breast and then your left hand to feel your right breast.

Use a firm, smooth touch with the pad of your 3 middle fingers, keeping the fingers flat and together.

Cover your entire breast from top to bottom, side to side; from your collar bone to the top of your abdomen and from your armpit to your cleavage.



Begin at the nipple, moving in larger and larger circles until you reach the outer edge of the breast. Also move your fingers up and down vertically, in rows. Begin examining each area with a very soft touch, and then increase pressure to feel the deeper tissue.

STEP 5: Feel your breasts in standing or sitting position (in shower).

It is easier to feel your breasts when skin is wet and slippery (like while taking bath)

Cover your entire breast, using the same hand movements as described above.



What's Next?

Repeat this exam every month—even if you're pregnant—to become more familiar with how your breasts normally look and feel.

If you find a lump or notice other unusual changes, Don't panic. About 80% of lumps found are not cancerous. See your doctor promptly for further evaluation.

CHAPTER 5

BREAST CANCER DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis of breast cancer is done by Triple test. It includes :

1. Clinical Examination
2. Mammography
3. Biopsy

Types of Mammogram :

1. **Screening Mammogram** : It is used to look for signs of breast cancer in women who do not have any breast complaints or symptoms.
2. **Diagnostic Mammogram** : It is done in women who have breast symptoms like a lump in breast. It may include extra view (images). It is also used to screen women who are already treated for breast cancer in the past.
3. **3D Mammography or Digital Breast Tomosynthesis** : This is a newer type of Mammogram in which the breast is compressed once & machine takes many low dose X-ray as it moves over breast. A computer then puts the images together into a 3 dimensional picture. It uses more radiation than standard 2-D mammogram, but it allow doctors to see breast tissue more clearly.

Breast Density

Mammogram gives assessment of breast density. Breast density is based on how fibrous & glandular tissues are distributed in the breast as opposed to fatty tissue. Dense breasts are not abnormal but they are linked to a higher risk of breast cancer. It make it harder to find a lesion on a mammogram.

Breast Biopsy

When the clinical examination and imaging shows abnormal findings like a lump in the breast, biopsy is done to confirm the diagnosis.

Types of Biopsies:

1. Fine Needle Aspiration Cytology (FNAC):

It is a simple, quick and inexpensive method using a thin needle to collect cells for microscopic examination.

2. Core Needle Biopsy:

A larger, hollow needle is inserted into the breast lump and cylindrical piece of breast tissue (core) is taken out for histopathological examination to confirm the diagnosis.

If the lump is palpable the doctor puts the core needle by feeling the lump. But if the abnormal area is not palpable the needle is put using some type of imaging test to guide the needle into the right place. These imaging test can be either ultrasound, mammogram or MRI breast.

3. Stereotactic Breast Biopsy:

This is used to biopsy suspicious microcalcifications or small tumors that cannot be clearly seen on ultrasound. In this procedure mammogram pictures are taken from different angles to pinpoint the biopsy site. A computer analyzes the x-rays of the breast and shows exactly where the needle tip needs to reach in the abnormal area.

4. Vacuum Assisted Breast Biopsy (VABB):

In this procedure a hollow probe is put through a small cut into the abnormal area of breast tissue using an image guidance. A core of tissue is then suctioned into the probe & a rotating knife inside the probe cuts the tissue samples. This method removes more tissue than a regular core needle biopsy.

5. Surgical (open) biopsy:

Surgery may be recommended for removal of high risk lesions where core biopsy is not confirmatory but lesion must be surgically removed.

CHAPTER 6

STAGES OF BREAST CANCER

Once the diagnosis of cancer is established by radiology and pathology, then staging is done to determine its extent.

Staging describes a cancer based on how much cancer is there in the body and where it is when first diagnosed. Different treatment strategies can be used depending on the stage of breast cancer.

Stages can be determined as :

- **STAGE 0** : DCIS (ductal carcinoma in situ). Cancer cells are trapped inside breast ducts with no ability to spread. LCIS (lobular carcinoma in situ) is not cancer, despite the name.
- **STAGE IA/IB** : Cancer cells invade the walls of duct or lobule, but the total size is under 2 cm, cells have not spread to lymph nodes.
- **STAGE IIA/IIB** : Cancers over 2 cm that have not spread to nodes or invaded chest muscle; Cancers under 5 cm in size that have spread to 1 to 3 axillary (armpit) lymph nodes .
- **STAGE IIIA/IIIB** : Cancers of any size that spread to 4 or more axillary (armpit) lymph nodes, the nodes around the clavicle (collarbone), and/ or the nodes under the sternum (internal mammary nodes); cancers over 5 cm that spread to any nodes; and tumours that have grown into the chest wall.
- **STAGE IV** : Cancer has spread beyond the breast and nearby nodes to other organs or distant nodes. The most commonly involved sites are lung, liver, brain and bones.

CHAPTER 7

TREATMENT OF BREAST CANCER

Treatment of breast cancer is a multi modality treatment which involves a Breast Surgeon, Medical Oncologist, Radiation Oncologist, Physiotherapist and a Counsellor. There are several ways to treat breast cancer depending on its type and stage. All cancers are different so treatment is personalised for the individual circumstances. The treatment includes:

Local Treatment : It means treating breast cancer without affecting the rest of the body. Types of local treatment used are :

- **Surgery :**

1. Breast conservation surgery- It includes lumpectomy and axillary dissection. Lumpectomy is removal of the tumor and a small cancer free margins of healthy tissue with oncoplastic surgery. BCS is always followed by radiation therapy.
2. Mastectomy - It is surgical removal of the entire breast. A breast reconstruction procedure can be done after mastectomy to recreate a breast shape.

Most patients with invasive breast cancer will have either a sentinel lymphnode biopsy or axillary lymphnode dissection depending upon the lymphnode involvement.

- **Radiation Therapy:** It uses high-energy rays to kill cancer cells. Radiation therapy may be used to destroy any remaining mutated cells that remain in the breast or armpit area after surgery.

Systematic Treatment : It means treating breast cancer using drugs, which can be given by mouth or directly into the bloodstream. These are called systemic therapies because they can reach the cancer cells anywhere in the body. It Includes:

- Chemotherapy
- Hormonal therapy
- Targeted drug therapy

CHAPTER 8

MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT BREAST CANCER

There are many myths regarding breast cancer and combined with lack of awareness, it delays the diagnosis and proper treatment. Also the social stigma associated with cancer silences women.

MYTH-1:-

Finding a lump means you have breast cancer.

FACT:-

If you find a lump in your breast there is no need to panic. Only 10% - 15% of these lumps turn out to be cancerous. However, a breast lump should never be ignored & undergo evaluation by breast specialist.

MYTH-2:-

Breast cancer is contagious

FACT:

Cancer is not contagious, just as diabetes or heart disease are not contagious. You cannot catch cancer by touching or hugging someone who has it.

MYTH 3:-

All breast cancers are life threatening.

FACT:-

Not all breast cancers are life threatening. Some breast cancers detected by screening & early breast cancers are completely curable.

MYTH-4:-

Having a family history of breast cancer means "I WILL" get breast cancer.

FACT:-

Only 10% of women with strong family history can have breast cancer, caused by abnormal changes (or mutations) in certain genes passed from parent to child. The vast majority of women who get breast cancer have no family history, suggesting that other factors must be at work, such as environment and lifestyle.

MYTH 5:-

Men do not get breast cancer.

FACT:-

Although rare, men also get breast cancer. As the breast tissue in men is less than that of women, it makes it difficult to detect cancer early and it spreads more quickly to the surrounding tissue.

MYTH 6:-

Antiperspirant & deodorants causes breast cancer.

FACT:

There is no evidence suggesting use of underarm antiperspirant or deodorant causing breast cancer.

MYTH 7:-

Wearing an undersize bra causes breast cancer.

FACT:-

Scientific evidence does not support a link between wearing an undersize bra & breast cancer risk.

MYTH 8:-

If I eat right, exercise daily, don't smoke and don't drink alcohol, I won't get breast cancer.

FACT:

A person can do everything "right" & still get breast cancer. For it, most risk factors like exercising & eating healthy only have a small effect on risk. This means there is no one behavior that will prevent breast cancer.

MYTH-9:-

Older people are not fit for cancer treatment

FACT:

There is no age limit for cancer treatment. Oncologist can individualise and modify treatment regimens according to the health of patient.

MYTH-10:-

Mammography is painful.

FACT:-

The pressure caused by compressing and stretching the breast tissue may be uncomfortable but not painful.

MYTH 11:-

Mammogram are unsafe & causes radiation hazards.

FACT:-

It is indeed safe. Mammogram require very small dose of radiation, the risk to health from this is insignificant. Screening mamograms is a Gold Standard method for detecting breast cancer early. The medical benefit of early detection outweigh any potential risk.

MYTH 12:-

Mammogram is 100% accurate in detecting breast cancer.

FACT:

Like other screening tests mammograms are not accurate. It is good at finding breast cancer early, but overall sensitivity of mammography is only about 87 percent. The reasons are :

- Some cancers are difficult to see on the mammogram
- The doctor reading the mammogram can miss the cancer

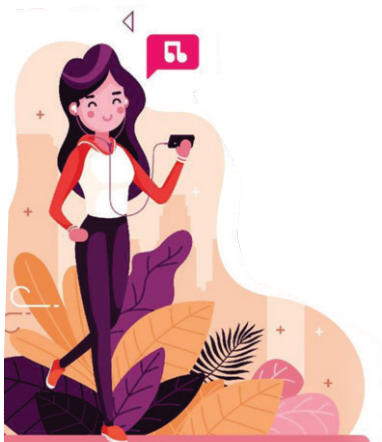
So, it is always advisable to get an ultrasound of both breasts along with mammogram for better accuracy.

MYTH 13:-

Younger women do not get breast cancer.

FACT:

All women are at risk of breast cancer, Although majority of breast cancer occurs in women over the age of 50, about 7% of all breast cancer cases happen in women under 40. Younger women ignore the warning signs as they believe they are too young to get breast cancer.



**MYTH :
YOUNGER WOMEN
DO NOT GET
BREAST CANCER**

CHAPTER 9

STEPS TO REDUCE RISK OF BREAST CANCER

1. Keep weight in check.
2. Avoid hormone replacement therapy.
3. Adopt healthy life style.
4. Follow healthy diet rich in fruits & vegetable .
5. Limit alcohol intake.
6. Do not smoke
7. Gather true information about family cancer history.
8. Be a mother: Term pregnancies reduces risk
9. Breast feed your infant.
10. Go for breast cancer screening & Detect it early.

NATURAL STRATEGIES TO PREVENT BREAST CANCER.

1. Do regular exercise every week:

According to reports, lack of physical activity contributes to 9% of breast cancer cases. People who are more physically active have reduced risk of breast cancer as well as other cancers.

- 240-300 minutes of exercise per week is a good target.
- Pick any activity you enjoy like brisk walking, tennis, swimming, cycling or dancing.
- Do it to the point that your heart hastens.

2. Eat healthy diet rich in fruits & vegetables and less meat.

More specifically, eat more brightly colored vegetables & fruits. Plant pigments called flavonoids have anti cancer properties and people who consume more of them have a reduced risk of breast cancer.

Foods containing flavonoids include onions, broccoli, eggplant, celery, lettuce, tomatoes, apples, oranges, melons, coffee, green tea & aromatic herbs.



3. Limit alcohol intake:

Drinking alcohol is tightly linked with breast cancer and the more you drink, the greater your risk. A study showed that even light to moderate drinking e.g. 3 or more alcoholic drinks increases risk of breast cancer in women by 15%.

Research indicates women who have survived breast cancer, curbing alcohol reduces the risk of recurrence. If you enjoy alcohol, try weaning yourself to sparkling water.

5. Keep weight in check:-

Maintaining healthy weight is an important goal for everyone. Being overweight can increase the risk of many different cancers, including breast cancer especially after menopause.

To lose weight, you need to either reduce calories intake or burn more calories.

6. Avoid menopausal hormone replacement therapy:-

Menopausal hormone therapy should not be taken long term to prevent chronic diseases like osteoporosis & heart diseases. Studies shows it has a mixed effect on health, increases the risk of breast cancer. If women do take menopause hormone replacement therapy, it should be for the shortest time possible.

CHAPTER 10

BREAKING THE NEWS

The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear.

The oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown.

-H.P. Lovecraft

The diagnosis of cancer brings out the worst fears, anxiety, uncertainty and frustration in a patient. Within a moment, their life seems to change forever. However, these reactions and emotions are normal.

A good doctor – patient relationship is a key to overcome these initial hardships.



In India, families frequently request doctors to hide the diagnosis from the patient. Infact, by not informing her we are underestimating her strength to deal with the situation. We are also depriving her of the right to make her own choices for her body.

In my opinion, all patients, educated or not, should be told about the diagnosis and treatment options in detail and with complete clarity. This would help them make an informed choice. It is also important that this information is accurate and therefore it should come from a reliable source such as your doctor.

Later as treatment continues, patient accepts the diagnosis which helps them to cope up better. Additionally, a holistic discussion gives clarity and reduces fear of the patient and the family.

In other words," DO NOT FEAR CANCER BUT UNDERSTAND IT."
Then it would be easier to fight back and win over it.

CHAPTER 11

LIFE AFTER BREAST CANCER

Once you have completed your treatments, family and friends expect you to go back to normal as you are cancer free now. Only some women are strong enough to be “positive and ready to move on”.

For some this period is harder to deal with because of the three main issues :

- Fatigue
 - Lack of confidence
 - Fear of cancer coming back
- All these feelings and concerns are normal.

The following suggestions may help :

- Talk to friends and family to let them know how you are feeling.
- Regular exercise after cancer treatment reduces fatigue, improves your sense of well being and quality of life. It also helps to prevent weight gain and reduces risk of recurrence.
- Practicing relaxation techniques or yoga, meditation and reiki can be very helpful.
- Share your experiences with patients who have just started their cancer journey. Inspire them with your story and feel contented for being useful to others. It will help you gain confidence.
- Patients maybe worried about how their surgery may affect their relationship with their partners or they may reject them physically,. It maybe helpful to seek clarification from your doctor.
- **FEAR OF CANCER COMING BACK** : Every women who has breast cancer wonders if it will come back. In some cases, it may come back months or years after treatment, for others it doesnot.

So after breast cancer treatment, it is important for survivors to go for regular follow up appointments as advised by your doctor to check for any signs of recurrence.

FOLLOW-UP AFTER BREAST CANCER TREATMENT

Each patient should have a follow up care plan after their breast cancer treatment.

1. The recommended doctors visits are as follows :

- Every 3 to 6 months for first 3 years,
- Every 6 to 12 months for years four and five
- Once a year thereafter.

2. A thorough physical examination is performed to rule out relapse of disease and few blood tests and special investigations are recommended depending on the necessity.

3. If symptoms or tests suggest a possible relapse then a whole body PET scan, MRI scan or bone scan may be done.

4. Post treatment mammogram : Schedule a mammogram once a year after the first mammogram that led to your diagnosis. If you have had a breast conservation surgery, wait for 6 months after your last treatment.

5. Pelvic examination : Consult your gynaecologist regularly, specially women on tablet tamoxifen. Women taking this drug should tell their doctor about any abnormal vaginal bleeding or spotting after menopause.

6. Bone density test : If you are taking an aromatase inhibitor (anastrozole, letrozole, or exemestane) or if you go through menopause as a result of treatment, your doctor will monitor your bone health by testing your bone density.

7. Genetic Counseling : If you have family history of cancer, you may benefit from genetic testing and counseling. For those women who are tested positive for genetic mutations (BRCA1 & BRCA2), MRI & Mammograms are recommended alternatively. Some women may consider surgical option of bilateral salpingo oophorectomy.

CHAPTER 12

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

Ques 1 : Is cancer screening available for all types of cancer ?

Ans : No, several factors are considered to determine whether the benefits of screening outweigh the risk and cost of screening.

Recommendations of various cancer screening are :

- Breast Cancer
- Cervical Cancer screening in women who are sexually active.
- Oral Cancer screening in tobacco users.
- Screening for colorectal cancer in a family history of colon cancer.

Ques 2 : What are precancerous breast lesions ?

Ans : Having a pre cancerous lesion doesnot mean that you have cancer. However, women diagnosed with pre cancers have a life timeincreased risk of breast cancer. Some pre cancer breast lesions are :

- Atypical ductal hyperplasia
- Lobular carcinoma in situ
- Papillary Lesions
- Radial scar

Ques 3 : Can breast cancer be cured ?

Ans : The cure rates of breast cancer depends upon the type of cancer and stage at which it is detected. With the advancement of medical treatment the cure rates for cancers has significantly increased.

Ques 4 : Can breast cancer recur ?

Ans : Yes, there is always a chance that it can recur. But with proper follow ups with your doctor and healthy lifestyle, the progression can be controlled.

Ques 5 : What are the side effects of chemotherapy ?

Ans : The side effects of chemotherapy are different for different people. All side effects are temporary and reversible. Common side effects are :

- Hairloss
- Nausea and Vomiting
- Infection and Neutropenia
- Loss of appetite
- Peripheral Neuropathy
- Heart damage (Cardiomyopathy)
- Mucositis (Mouth Ulcers)
- Constipation / diarrhea
- Cessation of menstruation
- Hot Flashes

Ques 6 : Is taking the cancer treatment (chemotherapy / radiation) worse than the disease itself?

Ans : Cancer treatment is life saving, specially when cancer is found and treated early. The side effects of chemotherapy and radiation fades away with time. Person who is thinking of refusing cancer treatment should talk with the doctor to clearly understand the outcomes of both treatment and non treatment. If a cancer is allowed to progress without treatment, it commonly causes death.

Ques 7 : What is lymphedema and how to prevent it?

Ans : Lymphedema is swelling in the arm or upper extremity due to build up of fluid in the soft tissues. This is due to obstruction of the lymphatic drainage system. It happens after axillary surgery or radiation due to removal of lymphnodes or scaring in the surgical area.

Measures to prevent Lymphedema:

- Exercise helps improve lymph drainage.
- Wear compression sleeve or elastic bandage.
- Eating a healthy diet and control body weight.
- Raising the arm above the level of heart when possible, let gravity help drain the fluid.
- Avoid exposing the arm to extreme temperatures (very hot/cold).
- Avoid IV line insertion, IV injections, blood pressure cuff or blood draws from the affected arm.
- Avoid wearing tight jewelery such as watch or rings on the affected arm.

CHAPTER 13

SURVIVOR'S STORIES



*Just when the caterpillar thought the world was over,
It became a butterfly.*



"Dear WaheGuruji!
My every cancer cell is
wiped out by your
powerful hands,
Lakh lakh Shukrana hai!!"

RAMEET KAUR

STORY 1 : FAITH IN ALMIGHTY

The word "Cancer" is deadly and scary. That's what people say and I believe it's true. That's why I would like to share my story because if I can survive this, anyone can. A person like me, who never smoked, drank alcohol, took any drugs, had no family history of cancer, a vegetarian whole life, even then a few cancerous cells can be born and show up suddenly in form of a breast lump and takes you by surprise.

One can be a happy cancer survivor like me. I did not think like this when I was diagnosed with solitary bone metastatic breast cancer. (spread to single bone, rib in my case).

It was February 2018 when I felt a lump in my left breast. I went to a big hospital near my home, where my scans and FNAC was done. I was informed that I had cancer limited to breast so they can do surgery for it and asked me to get admitted.

That small lump completely shattered me and my family. My life changed drastically; it was unbelievable as I was just 33 years old and my kids who were just 18 months and 8 years old. At first, my assumption that there are no chances of survival made me ask my husband to save money

children and let me go. I had no hope for survival and that's when my mother-in-law came to my rescue. She sat beside and said "Even if you don't want to live and your life seems unfair, you have to live. Not for me or your husband, but for your kids. Don't think that you are troubling the family. We are here with you. You just fight for your kids." This completely changed my perspective and gave me the strength to fight back and have a wonderful life ahead. Now that I look back, that moment seems funny and stupid because who would not want to live and wish for death.

My mother-in-law and husband were my pillars of strength. She did everything to keep the environment of the house positive and cheerful. She is very old and had some back issues. Still, she do everything for my kids.

As we decided for a second opinion, we went to Indraprastha Apollo hospital and met Dr Rajinder Kaur Saggu, she listened very patiently, assured and counselled me with her gentle smile that best of treatments are available to get rid of breast cancer now a days and there is nothing to afraid of and I should put my faith on Waheguru ji.

I underwent PET MRI scan and my cancer was declared metastatic due to a spot in my rib bone which had to be treated too. Even then Dr. Saggu motivated me to fight this battle together with my strength and help of family.

First I was given 6 cycles of Chemotherapy with Herceptin over six months and repeat PET MRI scan was done to see the response to treatment. Next, Breast conservation surgery was done where the tumor and surrounding tissues were removed. To my relief, there was minimum discomfort during or after the surgery.

Next came 12 cycles of targeted therapy with Herceptin and radiation to the breast as well as solitary bone disease which went on for over 12 months. The normal cells got affected during chemo. I was prepared for side effects as Dr. Saggu had informed me about how to fight them with a

smile. A few changes in lifestyle as well as diet and my husband's faith in Waheguru gave me strength. Before every chemotherapy session, I used to visit Bangla Sahib Gurudwara and seek blessings. My husband and brother inspired me to do so: I thought that Waheguru Ji is testing my faith and if He has put me in this situation, then Waheguru Ji will only help me to get out of this.

I included lots of fluid to keep myself hydrated. Also I adopted Yoga exercises and meditation which made me more physically as well as mentally strong.

Before chemotherapy, I had prepared my son as he was at an impressionable age. I knew he would be scared to watch my baldness and would be embarrassed too. I told him that I am unwell, but it will be fine after a few months and my hair would grow back. I started covering my head with “dastaar” (a kind of turban that Sikhs wear) so that he doesn't have to see me that way.

The other bothering issue was the seroma bag attached to my body. After the operation, a plastic drainage tube attached to a bottle called seroma bag is put to collect the fluid from the wound. This bag had to be carried all the time and while sleeping, it was difficult to sleep on one side. Another issue was to hide the bag from my kids. It would have been horrifying for them to see the blood and fluid collected in the bag. So, I had to hide the bag in a pouch like purse and carry it without being noticed.

Though the cancer cells were finally out of my body, there is a negative residue left ie Lymphedema. It is extra fluid builds up in tissues when lymphatic system isn't working well, usually because lymph nodes were damaged or removed. It's often a side effect of cancer treatment and can show up years later.

Due to spot in my bone (metastatic cancer) , Dr. Saggu suggested me surgery for removal of ovaries. So, I got laparoscopic surgery done for same. I was put on the hormone therapy which helps to eliminate the

chance of relapse. Finally, my treatment is over, apart from some bone strengthening Injections and hormonal treatment.

Today, together with Waheguru ji blessings, my inner strength, and support from family, I am not only living a normal life but a better one. I have an amazing yoga teacher who also supported me in every way.

To those who are fighting the same battle, I would like to say that one should not be scared of the treatment. Never should we lose hope. Not getting the treatment is like losing the battle even before the fight is started.

At last, I would like to thank Waheguru Ji as he blessed me with a wonderful doctor, who extended all her help whenever I needed her. I am also fond of writing poems and stories. I dedicated a beautiful poem to Dr. Rajinder Kaur. She is truly a blessing for her patients.





Though Life has given me
100 reasons to cry but
I showed Life
1000 reason to laugh..

ANUSUYA

STORY 2 : FIGHT IT WITH LAUGHTER

Cancer – a name in itself is very dreadful and fearing. But there are people like me who fought and won over this. Now I lead a normal life or I might say a better life. I use the word “better” as it gave me focus & showed me the true value of life. I began to love myself & started appreciating life that I had almost lost. Also, we get a lesson to take better care of our health and devote more time for ourselves.

Dear readers, I am Anusuya, 63 year old cancer survivor or I may say a cancer fighter. I call myself a fighter because I won over this disease with my courage, strength & will power along with the immense support and care of my doctor, Dr. Rajinder Kaur. After coming in contact with her I have realised why doctors hold a place next to God. She goes an extra mile to treat her patients and motivate them to fight over this deadly disease. She truly is a blessing for her patients.

It was 30th December, 2017 when I felt the shooting pain in my shoulder which radiated to my chest. But I ignored it assuming it to be a muscular pain. After 3 months, on 29 march 2018, I felt the same kind of shooting pain, when I was making arrangements to go and visit my sons living in

Dubai. Both my sons are settled in Dubai and my daughter stays in Canada. I and my husband live happily in Jalandhar, Punjab

I went to see a doctor at Jalandhar and he suggested me several tests as well as scan. I was informed and told that I am having “breast cancer”. But I didn't panic and boldly accepted it and asked the doctor to start the treatment as soon as possible.

I broke the news to my husband and to my brother who stays in Delhi. My brother suggested us to take a second opinion. So I and my husband went to Delhi on 30th march 2017. My brother had lined up appointments with 3 doctors in Delhi namely Rajiv Gandhi Cancer Institute, AIIMS & Apollo Hospital.

The very next day on April 1, we left home to meet the respective doctors. My husband advised me to start first consultancy from Apollo. That is when I first met Dr. Rajinder kaur Saggu. With my first interaction with her, I could feel that she was quiet empathetic towards her patients. She carefully studied my reports and very calmly explained me the line of treatment. Her knowledge in the subject was vast. She carried huge expertise in conducting numerous surgeries related to breast cancer. I could also perceive that she had strong work ethics and was quiet passionate about her work. I was so impressed by her positive attitude that I didn't feel the need to consult any other doctor.

The first step towards my treatment was mastectomy (complete removal of my right breast. There was not much discomfort during or after the surgery. I was comfortable doing my work from the very next day. I stayed in Delhi for my first cycle of chemotherapy which was after 21 days of surgery.

I faced almost no discomfort after my first cycle of chemotherapy. But after the second cycle, I felt weakness, constipation, nausea, vomiting. Sometimes I had mouth sores too. These symptoms lasted for a week after second chemotherapy. After that the life was quiet normal. My hairfall started after third cycle of chemotherapy but it didn't affect my

looks as I didn't lose all the layers of my hair. I want to share with you my readers that the stronger you are, the lesser are the side effects. I experienced that in my own case; and have been proven over time that a patient with positive attitude feels less pain and discomfort as well as recovers faster.

I went through 12 cycles of targeted chemotherapy and radiation sessions over 12 months. There were no much side effects of targeted chemo. I had my radiations done from Patel hospital, Jalandhar. The only side effects of radiations were the burns in the affected area. I consulted my doctor for the same & she prescribed some ointments and coconut oil for the affected area. Those burnt areas healed with time and some medications.

This was the most uncomfortable time which I faced during my treatment, that after my surgery I had to carry seroma bag for more than a month. The discharge of fluid after surgery kept flowing for more than a month.

Most people think that one cannot live a normal life after such an extreme medical treatment. But it's not true. In fact, I feel that a cancer survivor not only lives a normal life but a happy life too. A cancer patient can be treated within a period of 6 months to one year. While some diseases like rheumatoid arthritis, hypertension, diabetes or asthma will stay with you for long time in your life. A cancer survivor can be disease free after certain amount of time, just needs to take care of the health and go for regular health check-ups & scans.

Appropriate and timely treatment received can save you rather than harm you. If any day you feel sick or notice any symptoms in breast, don't ignore or panic. Just don't be shy away or be afraid to go for examination. As breast cancer is completely curable, if detected early.

Thanking to Dr. Rajinder Kaur from bottom of my heart, beyond her core job of a breast cancer surgeon, her charming personality and warmth made me choose her my doctor. I was lucky enough to be destined to be her patient.



Surviving cancer is not
the end of a gruesome story
It is the beginning
of a beautiful one..!!"

ANANDITA

STORY 3 : LIFE INTERRUPTED AGAIN!

The history repeated-itself and I was not at all prepared for the same trauma again which I went through during my college days. The trauma of cancer which my mother had suffered 20 years back, had interrupted my life again. And this time the victim was myself.

My mother had metastatic breast cancer. She fought bravely with it for almost 20 years. She passed away in 2015 and in June 2017, I was diagnosed with same dreadful malignant breast cancer . Ironically when she was diagnosed with cancer she was 42 years old and my age was 21. Now I am 42 years old and my son is 21 years old. At that time my dreams to study more were shattered and I was forced to marry at young age. This time also the real world took me into another war zone. I understood that life I had imagined will not be the same any more. I have to fight another battle like my mother did and overcome all fears.

I remember freezing in disbelief when I discovered a lump while changing clothes one night. At first instance, it came to my mind that it can be a tumor but my heart was not ready to accept that. Somewhere in my mind I had the feeling also that I would be spared

from any major health crisis myself as I was pretty much serious about my health, had mammograms with blood tests every year. But life is full of surprises. I didn't know if this was a surprise to me but it surely seemed to surprise my dear ones and my family. My husband was in a big shock, he went to take an appointment next morning for mammogram before I woke up.

I got the Mammogram done and reports were not good. I was advised for breast MRI and FNAC. These reports turned out to be positive and I was diagnosed with breast cancer. What followed next was consultations with more doctors and finally a treatment plan. Whilst I was trying to take this life challenge head on, I blocked my emotions. As my brain had innumerable questions; who will take care of the family? Will I be able to afford the treatment? Is my medical insurance policy sufficient? And the biggest one is why me? I had no answers. It was my destiny and instead of thinking more, I prayed to God to show me the right path and left the future on Him. I also did not want a pimple sized lump to ruin our lives. I took it upon myself to take care of my being and fight back.

I did not want my son to go through the same situation that I faced. I wanted him to study after graduation. I also didn't want my father to know about my health issues as I couldn't see him going through the same grief once again. He was devastated after he came to know the truth. Looking back into his life, he seems to be a fighter, who fought the battle of cancer with my mom. He stood strong by my side too and daily visits me during my treatment. My inlaws also faced the situation bravely beyond my expectations. Their support and love made me strong all days during the treatment.

In the initial stages, what I found most annoying was the pouring in of free advises! Some would say drink wheat grass juice, other recommends cow urine. All were very sure that these remedies would guarantee a cancer free life. This made me wonder why people are suffering world over, if given that all remedies lie in our garden or kitchen. Anyhow, I focused myself on my treatment plan prescribed by doctors.

Lumpectomy (breast conserving surgery) was done within 2 days of

confirmation of cancer, the affected lump was sent for biopsy and we found that 2 out of 6 lymph nodes had positive tumor cells. My Doctor Rajinder Kaur Saggu decided to give 6 cycles of chemotherapy and 20 radiations.

I had seen the effects of chemotherapy on my mother, she was treated for 20 years one after another procedure. I was aware of the side-effects as I saw her sufferings, but the fear of seeing those side-effects on me killed me more inside. During her chemo, I was there to hold her when she used to vomit and to help her in daily needs. But in my case, I was afraid who would stand up for me, as I had no sister or daughter. My mother-in-law is old enough, I didn't expect her to take my pain and run around for me. To my surprise, my husband was there for me as a pillar of strength; He helped me not only for my daily chores but comforted me in all the ways. He used to make fresh juice for me early morning, take care of my daily medication. Everything regarding me was done under his strict supervision.

My son took responsibility of taking me to hospital during chemotherapy sessions. My two close friends also accompanied me most of the times during my hospital visit. They came up as an army of supporters. I can't thank them enough for their unconditional support and unparalleled love. All of them make my hospital visits joyful. We use to play Ludo on our mobiles and some time my son and my friend start screaming like kids on winning or losing the game. Making nearby patients and their care takers pissed at us. We would then have to apologize to them and to the nurses also. This is how my chemo sessions passed out without much worries.

I lost my lengthy beautiful hair during second chemo. The most painful memory of mine is losing those tresses. After a point I couldn't handle it and called my friend to remove my hair for me. She handled the situation bravely without panic and consoled me well and also helped me get rid of that pain. She is the one who accompanied me from the first test to last day of treatment and became my mental and emotional strength. Other side-effects like vomiting, nausea and stomach ache didn't bother me.

Next was the radiation therapy, which was tough at its last cycles. I use to go to hospital with my husband early morning at 5 am, that itself was a different experience which made our relationship deeper. He is my greatest pillar of support, my safety net during any fall.

Finally the treatment was over, it took almost 8 months. After that Dr. Saggu prescribed a PET MRI and this time reports were good, everything was normal. I had not a single trace of cancer cell in my body left. I was declared Cancer Free. It was a delightful moment in my life and that day my son got me my favorite chocolate cake to celebrate my victory against cancer.



While my cancer cells died, my spirit to thrive more escalated. Now that I am strong and back on my feet, my only aim is to make my family strong and prove them that I would always be there with them. Immediately after my son graduated, we started looking for good colleges abroad, where he can concentrate on his studies and fulfill his dreams. He is studying in US for his masters degree. I feel myself blessed as I am able to do what I have planned for him.

Despite this, my biggest fear remained. What if this worst situation comes again into my life? Sometime I had weird thoughts of getting sick again. But my doctor, Dr. Rajinder Kaur always counseled me well and took me out from these negative thoughts. Her energy and at the same time her calmness helped me to move on. Her Godly-like presence in my life and her nothing-to-worry attitude pumped me up. Now instead of fearing the life ahead, I started looking forward positively for it.

Life after cancer should be physically and emotionally healthy. We need to nurture our body, mind and soul. I am happy that I am cancer free but at the same time I hate the feeling that I can't do anything to prevent my cancer coming back. I read in many books that Light exercise, improved balanced diet and practicing stress management in form of yoga & meditation techniques have universally positive benefits. I have engaged myself in relaxation methods and started doing physical exercise, it helped in relieving stress. I have noticed a positive change in myself and I am successful in diminishing my fears. I am doing maximum efforts to take care of my body because our body is our life partner throughout our lives. The more we care for it, the more it will care for us.

Breast Cancer had also been monumental in transforming me as a person. I know I have survived that means I have to add meaning to my life now. I started doing some services for the society and organizes the event "BHALAI KI DUKAN" twice a year to distribute clothes to needy. God has given me another life, I want to thank him by giving back and spreading happiness all over around me.

Fighting Cancer teaches us to be strong, courageous and brave but most of all it teaches us to appreciate every moment of life we have. A positive attitude and a bright smile can go miles in recovery. And if you have a supportive family and loving friends like mine. You can find the strength to overcome anything in life.



Pink is pretty,
pink is bright...
made a decision to
live and fight.

KANIKA

STORY 4: FEAR TO FREEDOM

“ If children have the ability to ignore all odds and percentages , then maybe we can all learn from them. When you think about it, what other choice is there but to hope? We have two options, medically and emotionally, "Give up or fight back”.

It is difficult to come across people who are willing to expose their most vulnerable selves to the world, so that the world can benefit from their experience. Especially when it comes to breast cancer, most women prefer to be guarded about their disease, not wanting to share details, fearing judgement and unwanted sympathy for a woman. For a woman, her breasts are not just that define her femininity , they are very personal and sensitive to her.

In such circumstances it is rare to hear a patient introducing herself as follows: My name is KANIKA ARORA . I am 34 years old now, a teacher by profession. I am not just a cancer survivor; I am a cancer conqueror. If my story can help others, then it is worth sharing every detail. This is the journey of my triumph over cancer.”

When I heard the heart rendering words, “It's cancer””. I was 32 years old, a happily married woman with 2 children, I was totally busy in studying bachelor in education [B.Ed] at that time. I can proudly say that

I have completed my B.Ed during my treatment. I used to complete my assignments on the bed of the hospital and sat for my exams after the 3rd day of my chemotherapy.

One unfortunate day, I noticed a lump in my left side breast, I was confused as to what it was? I informed my husband about this and he promptly said that we should not waste time and he immediately took an appointment with one of the surgeons we knew very well. Next day we both visited the surgeon and he prescribed for an ultrasound. I got it done on the very next day. I got the report in the evening, I immediately went back to the surgeon, he said it's nothing but only a lump and will be removed through surgery. I was much relaxed and thought it was only a surgery, but still wanted to take a second opinion.

Then I searched DR. RAJINDER KAUR SAGGU from Apollo Hospital on Internet, I took an appointment with her . She guided me for an FNAC test. I got it done and came back home because my reports were supposed to come in the evening. In the evening I got to know that my reports were complicated and I was advised for further investigations, an MRI and biopsy. I was shocked at that time. Next day again I went to the hospital for my tests.

During the MRI test, I continuously chanted and prayed to God for better results. The doctor asked me for biopsy and it also got done and the reports came after two days. Waiting for my biopsy results was absolutely scary. After two days of nervous anticipation, I finally received my biopsy reports which confirmed CANCER, the lump was malignant. It was Invasive Duct Carcinoma. I was devastated and cried continuously.

My entire world had turned upside down within one second. I thought God was extremely unfair to me. . I remember, when I was returning home, unable to stop my tears from flowing. My family was trying really hard to support me and to convince me that I was going to be alright. . Nevertheless, I was thankful that my breast cancer was caught early. My family was the outmost support at that time but my biggest supporters

were my mother in law, father in law, husband , and my younger sister .

As I embarked upon this journey, it gave me plenty of knowledge about cancer. To start with my treatment, I was hospitalized for two days for whole body PET scan (for Staging of disease), Chemoport implantation for easy intake of chemotherapy medicine, and my first chemotherapy cycle.

I cannot forget my first chemo as it was horrible, I still remember after that I could not eat anything for three days . On the third day when I felt better I sat with my kids, played with them and chatted with them. It was so much relieving when your lovely kids are around with you. I forgot my pain and just wanted to be with my kids.

The one highlighted side effect is that every patient has a lot of trouble coming to terms with loss of hair. About two weeks after my first chemotherapy, I started losing my hair, discovering bunch of them on my pillow each time I couldn't swallow the drastic change in my appearance, and it broke me down a little. I devastated with my baldness, but I pulled myself up, and decided to focus on the positive aspects. "For me chemotherapy had worked" as Dr. Saggi explained me that if your hair falls after 2nd chemotherapy that means the medication is working.

I experienced minimal physical pain as opposed to the painful stigma one usually associates with the term "CANCER". My emotional pain gradually reduced as I could see myself growing better. Although I lost my eyelashes and eyebrows, and I was completely bald, I did not care as I started searching for caps and scarves and I ordered some beautiful caps online .

I initially got four chemotherapy cycles , then breast conserve surgery [BCS] and after it continued with four more chemotherapy cycles and 25 sittings of radiation. It took 6 months to complete my treatment with full support and love of my family.

Dr. Rajinder kaur was the biggest support as she was very positive and

really helpful and explained the entire treatment to me very patiently and nicely. She gave me hope that despite difficulties in the journey of breast cancer treatment, the destination was going to be beautiful and worth it with my life being saved. Most importantly, it is important to have a good doctor, whom you can believe in for most suitable treatment and good quality of life in later years.

Now, that I am done with my treatment. I started my life on a healthier note. My hair began to grow back and my personal and social life is as normal as ever. On 3rd may 2018 I started working as a teacher in a school. Cancer could not take away my physical attributes and strength.

I have learnt to live by trusting God for his ways, I cannot live in fear of the future or keep thinking of the past. Now, I am completely, one hundred percent living my life to the fullest in the present. I love people even more deeply as life is finite. I strive to take the best care of my spiritual, physical and emotional health. I am more observant, always prioritizing what is necessary and more thankful for what I have. But this journey does not define me I'm not identified as somebody who had breast cancer I'm identified as somebody who conquered it and is so much more than just an ex-patient.

This journey wouldn't have been possible without the support of my family, my doctor Dr. Rajinder Kaur Saggu and every single person who has fully supported me. I would always be eternally grateful to them. Finally, I would like to say,

“DEAR CANCER, I WIN,”



I was taught by cancer that the people in your life are most important-not your looks or what you have.

RITU

STORY 5 : TOO YOUNG FOR CANCER

Cancer is seen as death. I would like to change this attitude. In 2018, I noticed a small lump on my right breast. It was painless so I didn't bother much. But as time passed, I noticed it growing, this worried me. I went to a general physician who suggested me some tests including FNAC.

When the report came, it was disturbing. I was very disheartened as I had a 7 year old daughter and was planning for my second baby. I had seen both my father and father-in-law not surviving cancer, so it was dreadful. At the same time I had seen my boss in my own office where I work fighting cancer and winning over it.

My husband checked internet for a Breast Cancer Surgeon in Apollo hospital. We knew one thing that team of doctors from Apollo Hospital could be trusted. Then we met Dr. Rajinder kaur Saggu. Her assurance and counselling helped me a lot. Actually I was not only looking for a doctor who could offer best treatment, but also the one who could boost my inner strength. And fortunately I was lucky enough to find her. She is a rare class of doctors who touches the heart of human being's closely apart from being doing their scientific job. I regained my positive attitude towards life and decided to be strong. She suggested me lumpectomy and my breast was conserved followed with 6 cycles of chemotherapy and radiations. During my treatment I didn't take any

break from my office due to immense support from the company. I am the manager in a leading mobile network company.

Chemotherapy cycles were really tough. After my first chemo, I was unable to eat and became too weak due to vomiting. After my second chemo, I had severe stomach ache. When pain killers didn't work, I consulted Dr. Rajinder Kaur. She advised me abdominal scan and I was diagnosed with kidney stone. I took homeopathy medication for that. Another issue was falling of hairs. I didn't get disappointed, got my head shaved and ordered a wig. I was surprised to get compliments for my new look. Other side effects which I faced were oral problems, pain in nerves, nausea and fall in white blood cells. But these side effects didn't stop me. I kept myself busy in office and family. Also Dr. Rajinder Kaur, assured me that all the side effects of chemotherapy are temporary, and the patient recovers completely in 4- 6 weeks after its completion,

I would like to share an experience that I cannot forget. I visited a Mall - "Select City Walk" with my daughter. There, I felt severe stomach ache and went to the washroom. I started puking and felt unconscious. The facility staff there called my husband and I was rushed to the nearest hospital. This was my worst experience when I felt so helpless. Thereafter, I took proper care of my diet during my chemo sessions to keep my immunity strong and keep my body healthy. I avoided eating street food. I ate homemade "Golgappas and Papri Chat" which I missed eating so much. I included juices, soups, limewater in my diet to stay hydrated. It helps to flush out chemo drugs from the body. I had expected the radiotherapy to be very bad. But honestly, it was not at all painful. I felt almost no side effects.

I am really fortunate to have the immense support of my family. Their care and perseverance made the entire experience easier for me. And the most special of all Dr. Rajinder Kaur, I cannot thank enough to God to bring me to her for my treatment.

Today I cannot believe that I have recovered. I have a habit of sharing my experience with my dear ones because I want everyone to know that cancer is not end of life. I believe it's only the best children of God who have to give their exam. You are strong so you are tested. So don't worry. Stay happy, be positive and be strong.



I have been assigned
this Mountain of Cancer,
to show others that
it can be moved..

MADHU

STORY 6 : KNOWN SURPRISES

15th January, 2019, its 8 o'clock in the morning and I am very excited to get ready for my next training session in Hyderabad. Oh! But I suddenly felt a lump in my right breast while getting ready. All this brought back me the memories of my mother who was diagnosed and treated of Stage 2 breast cancer in the year 2002 wherein a mastectomy and chemotherapy were done. Unfortunately, it again resurfaced in 2013 in the form of Uterus cancer, which was again very physically and mentally taxing for her. I got a sudden bolt that I might have to go through the same traumatic experience sent shivers in my body for some moments and mind went blank.

This also reminded me of Dr. Rajinder Kaur Saggu's session on Breast cancer in our organisation held on Women's Day 2017.

I never thought I could be so ignorant even after being aware of the risks and signs of Breast Cancer and till the age of 46, of not going through any screening tests. However, trying to still stay upbeat, I proceeded to my training till 19th January 2019. When I returned to Delhi, I again put the thought of cancer on back burner and started to get prepared for a vacation with my husband and some of our best friends to Thailand. Getting there, I couldn't keep my worry in my mind any longer and told my husband about the issue. He got so concerned throughout the trip,

that he kept thinking about it. I also told my friends about it and all of them persuaded me to visit a doctor as soon as we return home.

On 1st Feb we returned to Delhi and I immediately booked an appointment with my Gynaecologist for the 2nd of February who immediately referred me for a mammogram and ultrasound. The ultrasonologist looked concerned and this worried us even more.

As expected, the reports did not look good and I was advised to see an Oncologist. I still couldn't believe that the word 'CANCER' was back in my life and I did not do anything about it to prevent it. However, Dr. Saggu's words had stayed with me and I immediately booked an appointment for the very next day.

Upon meeting her, I went through routine tests and gave a detailed family history of cancer, I was immediately advised for FNAC in the Pathology Department. All hell broke loose when I was conveyed my FNAC report the next day and I was facing with the reality of having a "Carcinoma in the Duct".

I felt completely broken and mentally shouted at myself for being so negligible. The worst part was that, as a well educated and well read woman, I knew of all the risks and the tests and yet I ignored to get any till that time. But Dr. Rajinder Kaur took care of me not only as my physician, but also became my emotional and psychological support and gave me added strength to deal with this disease.

I went for the next appointment to meet Dr. Rajinder with my husband and my parents where everything was explained to me in detail, that a lumpectomy will be conducted and based on the biopsy reports, it'll be clearer as to what is the stage, type of cancer and what will be the course of treatment.

As I was mentally preparing myself for this life changing surgery, I got mixed news in the form of a rather daunting PET Scan report which confirmed that even though all my other organs were cancer free, the

number of lumps were many, so I had Multifocal disease.

Keeping all this in mind, Dr. Kaur suggested Segmental Mastectomy (part of breast to be removed) along with a breast reconstruction. Everything was readily arranged and all hands were on deck to take care of any and all of my needs. My surgery went off well in hands of Dr. Saggu and next was Radiation therapy which turned out to be relatively comfortable with almost no side effects at all. Chemotherapy was not required in my case as I had only DCIS (Ductal Carcinoma In Situ) Stage 0 Cancer. Now I am on hormonal therapy and leading a normal life.

Looking back, the best decisions were the one that were taken in the spur of the moment, visiting Dr. Kaur in a timely manner really helped us get a hold over this disease at early stage and the constant support from my family and friends, especially from my husband gave me the much needed strength to face this ordeal.

I am so glad today to have a healthy body image and I carry my breasts with utmost grace and femininity.

As Dr. Saggu rightly said and I humbly agree, "I am a blessed soul."



I don't know how
strong I am,
until being strong
is the only choice I have!

JYOTI BHATIA

STORY 8 : CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

Life is full of challenges. I was challenged with the most dreadful one- "Cancer". I believe one can easily fight cancer with the strong will power which works as miracle along with the medical treatment.

Dear readers, I am Jyoti, running a boutique in south Delhi. It was May, 2011, when while changing I noticed my underarm area turning blue. I thought the color of some kurta might have bled. I ignored it. But very next morning I felt the need to discuss the same with my mother-in-law. She asked me to consult our family doctor. I visited the doctor & she advised me to get mammogram done. I got the test done and showed it to the doctor. They further recommended for biopsy. Although my doctor asked me to relax & said there is no need of any further treatment. But my husband was not satisfied with her advice . We decided to take opinion of other doctor.

I knew Dr. Rajinder kaur who is my boutique's client. I discussed with her about the reports. She called me to Apollo hospital next morning and after observing my reports she suggested FNAC. After two days doctor revealed that reports were not good & I need to get operated as soon possible. I had an appointment at visa office as we had planned family trip to London. From there I went to the hospital along with my mother in law & husband. After knowing all the problem , my mother in law

started crying and told doctor about the trip but she suggested I should undergo surgery first to remove the tumor. Then next morning I got admitted & got my surgery (breast preserving surgery) done on 12/12/12. After the surgery, my biopsy reports revealed early stage cancer and my next treatment plan was 8 chemos & radiations. Dr Rajinder and her team gave me tremendous emotional support at every step of my treatment and this helped me overcome the trauma.

Chemotherapy were really tough. I suffered from low blood pressure, vomiting & dehydration. But at the same time Dr Rajinder helped me to deal with all side effects of medication. She used to educate me about the sideeffects before every chemotherapy and counselled me how to relax, meditate and focus on my inner strength. I used to visit other patients in the hospital who were also taking chemo, talk to them, take their suggestions as well. This really helped me a lot.

I suffered the most in my last two chemos as my body had become very weak. My biggest fear was the loss of my hair. But I fought my fear with different styles of wigs to overcome my dull looks due to weakness. This also boosted confidence in me. None of my clients & friends could judge that I was suffering from such a dreadful disease. Having sensitive skin, radiotherapy was worst. My skin got blisters & burns. I used to sleep in air conditioner, even in month of december during radiations. And finally, after radiations my treatment was completed.

Today 8 years have passed since I was diagnosed with cancer, and I am living a healthy and happy life. I feel blessed to come out of this disease as a fighter. I can say I won the challenge with sincere determination, courage & support of my family and my doctor. Dr Rajinder is truly a blessing in my life.

I am completely fine now. Ofcourse, it was unfortunate that I had to go through so much pain but at the same time it taught me many good things of life. It helped to understand that life is unpredictable. God sent Dr Rajinder as a sister to me in my life who not only save me but guide me through out my life. Above all, it made me believe that "hope" is one of the strongest thing in the world like love. Its so strong that it can give meaning to our life.

To sum up, yesterday is history, tomorrow is mystery, today is gift of God.



Once I overcame Cancer,
I was not afraid of
Anything, Anymore !

MADHU SRIVASTAVA

STORY 8 : ME - THE WARRIOR

I had a life like any normal Indian girl would dream to have. A lovely family, life full of hopes and dreams for the future. But isn't it true, that every story takes a turn? Yes, so did my life.

I am Madhu Srivastava. Everything was going usual in my life. In a metro city, you can't stop and see what is actually happening, you just keep moving forward as there is no time to wait. And sometimes there comes a crossing, where you have to make a decision which way to go.

For me the day I found out that I had breast cancer, almost everything changed I would have not even found out about it, if one day I had not realized I was having a continuous pain and thickness in my right breast. I kept ignoring the pain, thinking it was just because of too much work and stress. But when even after a couple of weeks, it didn't get any better, my husband advised me to see a doctor. And it came out to be something unexpected, it was cancer. Just like any other human being would have reacted, I was shocked, so was my family. When I got back from the hospital, with teary eyes. I disclosed the news to my daughter and my mother-in-law, made me weak for once.

But soon I gathered my emotions and had to tell myself that it is for my family that I have to wake up every day with a hope and a smile on my

face. That is what is going to give me strength and them too.

Thanks to God my cancer was treatable and curable. After consulting few doctors, tons of tests, many of them told me the best way is to get my breast removed. For me, it was a hard decision, but in order to save my life, if I had to do it. I would have done it.

For someone who lost both her parents to cancer, it was not only a disease, in fact it was a battle of life and I had to win it. My destiny took me to Dr. Rajinder kaur Saggu, who sat down and actually explained to me what was actually wrong and to my relief, she told me that my breast can be saved. She started the treatment with 6 chemotherapy cycles. Those six months made me realise why people are so afraid of chemotherapy. I felt weak and uneasy for few days right after the chemotherapy; then came the sleepless nights when my hair started falling off. It was all like a bad dream. Instead of seeing them fall daily I decided to shave my head. The rest of months passed somehow.

The hospital became my second home. After chemotherapy, I underwent breast conserving surgery and then after one month, radiotherapy. Since I developed skin issues so I had to take few breaks during radiotherapy but eventually, those sessions also ended. Soon, my targeted chemotherapy therapy is also about to finish.

Usually, people look into negative aspects in a situation, but I think that one should look for positive aspects into the situation and move forward. Look for what you gain, not what you lose. And I believe that there is power, call it God, who does put the hardest hurdles in the way of the strongest, to test them. We don't have to turn our back from those hurdles; we have to face them, with whatever we have. That's how you live through your life.

Here I want to mention one thing very unique and might sound strange to others, that is my "Chemoport". Usually people get rid of such bad memories and throw them away. But after my surgery when my husband showed me the "Chemoport" which was given by Dr. Saggu

I immediately decided to keep it near to my heart where it was planted. I wanted to keep that small piece of metal which gave me pain but actually it was a medium to save my life through life saving drugs. We went to a Jeweller and got it converted into a beautiful pendant, which will always be hanging from my neck and keep reminding me that I have to take care of myself for the rest of my life. Because prevention is always better than cure.

Now that God has given me another chance to live in this world, I want to dedicate my life for God's cause. Fortunately I'm blessed with fine hand painting, so I decided to do something productive out of it. In our country, we see some people only lose their life because they couldn't afford to pay the medical bills or even the doctor's fee. Since I know the pain, I wanted to do something for them. During treatment, I started painting and whatever I could earn by selling them, I saved it to help poor and needy patients. This idea was appreciated by everyone and I successfully sold many of them.

In my story, I was lucky enough to have my husband who is always there with me on each and every step; my daughter and mother-in-law who made me smile in the most difficult times. I think it is important to have people with good heart by your side. At such times, everything counts. I firmly believe everything you ever did, for good, it comes back to you.

Lastly, I am very grateful to Dr. Rajinder Kaur Saggu from the core of my heart for her medical expertise, her kindness and immense support in making my ordeal so comfortable. Without her presence around I think I would not be what I am today. She is the epitome of my strength.

GRATITUDE

I am too moved to even write this as I am arriving at the completion of my journey to write this book.

I was just a Doctor, though with my own level of humanity, but my friends who came in my life in the garb of patients, really enhanced my humanity factor to reach to a level, which even I had never conceived.

My gratitude or conveying thanks to them will be undermining their role still I wish to say from the core of my heart that I will always remain indebted to them for their role, support and inspiration in my life.

I am not quoting any names as leaving even a single name would make me feel guilty as I know that each one of them knows that how from a patient doctor relationship we have graduated to be a family.

Even though I know that words cant suffice my gratitude to the contributions made by all in my journey. I have just made an honest attempt to acknowledge the contributors and influences of my journey in writing this book.