

Self Care for Breast Cancer Survivors

An Interview with Therapist Cheryl Krauter



Jaleh, Yahoo Contributor Network
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An important part of after treatment for [breast cancer](#) survivors is self care. Self care is a great way to rejuvenate and feel whole as a person again. To help get some self care ideas for breast cancer survivors, I have interviewed therapist and breast cancer survivor Cheryl Krauter.

Tell me a little bit about yourself.

I am a breast cancer survivor, wife, mother, psychotherapist (over 30 years in private practice) and dog owner. I was diagnosed with Triple Negative Breast Cancer (a rare and aggressive form of breast cancer) in March of 2007 and underwent surgery, chemotherapy and radiation treatment. I completed treatment on October 31st, 2007(Happy Halloween!)"

"I was fortunate to be able to work during treatment, which helped me normalize the experience both for my family and myself. The focus on others was very helpful to me. Now I feel like I am living my life in "bonus time." For me, facing my own mortality brought me to a place of gratefulness for each day I have. This is not to say it is all good and positive. I find that an oppression that many of us as cancer survivors face is the idea that we should always be positive and "get over" our experience. It isn't always so easy...nor is it even what we may need to do."

"I have developed a deep interest in the survivorship phase of breast cancer, not only from my personal experience, but also in listening to the experiences of others. There are common threads that weave into a tapestry of thoughts and emotions that many of us discover after finishing treatment for breast cancer. For me, this is the richness and opportunity of surviving breast cancer. Hey, you gotta get something out of all that!"

What type of impact does breast cancer have on someone's overall life?

"We must let go of the life we have planned, so as to accept the one that is waiting for us." Joseph Campbell

"Breast cancer is not "one size fits all" so the impact of the experience is very personal for each individual. There are some people who choose to move away from the experience as fast as they possibly can, no looking back. Then there are others who are affected for years after they have finished their treatment. Each person has a unique path. Certainly there can be issues of isolation, ongoing physical problems, and financial concerns."

"I have come to believe that there is trauma associated with a breast cancer diagnosis, treatment and survivorship. When that trauma remains unaddressed and untreated, there can be ongoing stress, emotional difficulties and even physical problems. Therefore, I advocate working with this trauma so that a woman can move through her experience with breast cancer."

"My own personal experience with breast cancer changed me in ways that I am still discovering. My vision actually changed and I see light and color in a more vivid way. Old ways of hesitating or holding back are pretty much gone. I am more of a risk taker. My sense of humor grew and deepened as well as my capacity to be fully present in each moment. I live now on "bonus time" and am pretty happy about that."

What are some self-care tips for breast cancer survivors?

"You can find self care tips for diet, exercise/movement, meditation quite readily on the internet, in books, in magazines. These areas are covered very well if you want to find them."

"Emotional self-care for survivors is more difficult to find. Some cancer centers and hospitals provide support groups but even these groups are often geared for newly diagnosed or metastatic cancer

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patients. Many women find help after finishing treatment more daunting and confusing. I know, I was one of them. Some women are interested in a deeper therapeutic exploration of their breast cancer and I believe this is an area that is still being developed. In reality, it is a somewhat newer area as more people are surviving cancer than in the past."

"Self care tips for emotional well-being might include: Giving yourself space and time. Finding guidance through the maze of survivorship. Working with trauma. Allowing yourself to find the new sense of who you are."

What type of professional help is available for breast cancer survivors?

"Some professional help for breast cancer survivors include: Cancer center groups and/or groups in hospitals. Women's Cancer Resource Center- Oakland, California (There may be women's cancer centers where you live.) Psychotherapists who are experienced in working with cancer- some may be survivors themselves."

"I would like to see an integrative model of medicine in which an oncology team included a psychotherapist who is available to women finishing treatment for breast cancer. The end of treatment is a key time when many feel as though they have "fallen off the end of the earth into a very scary void." I strongly believe that the recovery from cancer as well as an ongoing quality of life in survivorship would occur if attention were paid to the emotional phase of treatment."

What last advice would you like to leave for breast cancer survivors?

"Honor your own unique path. Don't let anyone push you or pull you off your own unique path and keep fallin' forward!"

Thank you Cheryl for doing the interview on self care tips for breast cancer survivors. For more information on Cheryl Krauter or her work you can check out her website on <http://www.breastcancersurvivorsupport.com>.

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