



Cancer Q & A

with Kathy Kanavos

Ask Me Anything!

KATHY O'KEEFE KANAVOS ADDRESSES YOUR CONCERNS ABOUT CANCER

Dear Kathy,

After being diagnosed with invasive ductal carcinoma in my left breast, I had a mastectomy, chemotherapy and radiation. It seems as if my fatigue after a 12-hour work day is no longer just "tired," but overwhelming fatigue

Some days, I feel normal and then other days the fatigue hits me "like a brick" with no specific reason. Is this normal and does it go away after treatment?

Donna

Dear Donna,

During treatment, fatigue is often an expected side effect. Throughout all of my treatments, I experienced bouts of fatigue. However, I have discovered that eating healthy foods, getting ample sleep, walking, and engaging in activities (praying, reading the Bible, taking Bible classes online and at church, gardening, sewing, writing, and keeping in touch with family and friends) help me to cope with fatigue.

I was diagnosed with Stage 4 lobular breast cancer in 2004, and took CMF chemotherapy for six months, followed by radiation therapy and a double mastectomy.

Fatigue during treatment was the worst but I still tired easily during radiation, especially toward the end of the six weeks. I usually got up at 10:00 a.m., took a nap at noon that lasted until 3 p.m. and then went to bed for the night at 7:30 p.m. I slept a lot! Some days I just had enough energy to go to treatment and then crawl back into bed and sleep.

It has been 8 years since then. My energy returned as my body healed. I drank energy drinks like Pure Protein Shake (available at Trader Joe's Markets) whenever I was too tired to eat. I preferred it over other energy drinks because it was lower in sugar and calories. Protein is a building block of health.

I also took and still take daily vitamins. I now play tennis, scuba dive, horseback ride and "shop 'till I drop." I took naps for the first two years after treatment but now I seldom feel the need or the fatigue. The body is amazing in its ability to heal.

Ask me anything.

Kathy

If you are struggling with your own diagnosis, or know someone who is, please email Kathy with your questions and concerns at: katkan@comcast.net

Dear Kathy,

Ever since my mastectomy has healed, that area of my skin remains hot. I had my operation months ago yet it

remains hot. Do you know if this means anything?

Betty

Dear Betty,

Have you talked to your doctor/nurse practitioner about it? A "hot" temperature usually signals infection or inflammation. I had an infection after my mastectomy and my skin was redder and felt hot to the touch. Antibiotics cleared up my infection.

Did you have Radiation treatment? I had radiation treatment after my mastectomy and it caused burning/hot feelings on the scar. Did you have an expander put in after surgery? Stretching of the skin can cause it to feel hot. Discuss all of this with your doctor.

Ask me anything.

Kathy

Dear Kathy,

I'm suffering from neuropathy and it is really annoying, painful and debilitating. It is in my fingers and especially my feet. My oncologist suggested taking vitamin B-6, which I am doing. I did acupuncture and I think it helped a bit, so I am going back again this week for more. Did you have this and what worked for you?

Jane

Dear Jan

I had neuropathy during chemo and the bottoms of my feet felt like they were on fire! Believe it or not, about three years after chemo, it began to disappear, and is now completely gone.

I found that it was always worse at night when I was tired, or anytime I was stressed, like on the day of treatment. Many of my chemo-friends swore by acupuncture as a means of relief or used 200 mg of Neurontin at night, prescribed by their doctor. Another friend used Diabetic Cream for Neuropathy on her feet. You can get it at rite-aid drug store for \$19.99 and it will last for a month.

I chose to soak my feet in a warm bath because heat seemed to alleviate the symptoms. So heating pads, warm baths or showers before bed helped because my neuropathy was worse at night. I had also heard that cocoa butter or cocoa butter oil used on your hands and feet can help "put out the fire". I didn't notice much difference, but they were good moisturizers for my chemo related dry skin.

I also took daily walks to increase the blood flow to my extremities that fed the neurons that sent the synapses of feelings that connected to the nerve cells. This also helped control the needle-and- pins feeling of my feet being asleep.

Spoil your feet with comfortable and warm shoes. Ugg makes a moccasin-type slipper shoe that has a better base for foot support and still has the comfy sheepskin inside. <http://www.zappos.com/ugg-ansley-light-grey>. Another option is hush puppies.

Hang in there.

Ask me anything.

Kathy

Hi, Kathy,

My friend is starting chemo next week for recurrent breast cancer. Any ideas about what would be a good gift for her?

Linda

Hi, Linda,

Diem Brown's foundation and [Medical Gift Registry](#) allows you to help your friend set up her very own gift registry, just like a wedding registry, during the fight for her health.

Her friends and family can go online and purchase items for her. Help her let them know what she needs from slow cookers for quick meals and other kitchen gadgets to maid service and spa treatments. However, the biggest gift that you could give your friend right now is your support. Be with her; talk to her; give hugs; and cry with her, too. Sit with her during treatments. Do not let her go alone. Call her often. If she doesn't want to talk, she won't answer the phone.

Encourage her, empathize with her, and just be there for her. Take her grocery shopping or get her list and do it for her. Celebrate the completion of each treatment as one more step in the right direction.

There is nothing like the support, encouragement and understanding from a good friend who is there to comfort. Give her soft, fuzzy socks to wear at chemo, because you get so cold while getting your infusion; or a nice warm blanket or shawl to cuddle with during treatment or at home when napping.

Also, really nice organic hand and body creams help because the chemo dries your skin out. She might also appreciate a meal dropped off when she gets home from treatment that she can eat when her appetite returns. Support is vital.

Thanks for being such a good friend to one of my "Sister-in-Arms." You are a treasure.

Ask me anything.

Kathy

Kathleen O'Keefe-Kanavos is a two-time breast cancer survivor who penned **SURVIVING CANCERLAND: The Psychic Aspects of Healing**.

She is represented by Devra Jacobs of Dancing Word Group, and Steve Allen Media. In addition to writing this column, she's a phone counselor for R.A. BLOCH Cancer Foundation, an inspirational speaker, and appears frequently on inspirational radio shows.

Visit her [website](#) and [Facebook page](#), follow her on [Twitter](#) and connect with her on [LinkedIn](#).