

## **MY TREATMENT IS OVER....NOW WHAT?**

### **13 Simple Strategies**

1. Lower your expectations and be gentle with yourself. You don't have to be perfect.
2. Don't rush it. Remember, recovery is going to take months. It will take at least as long as your treatment lasted to feel truly well.
3. Move away from people that are negative. Nurture relationships that make you happy.
4. Anticipate having at least one medical scare. Odds are it will turn out to be nothing.
5. If you have not been happy with your doctor(s), make a change.
6. If you are interested in complementary therapies, now is the time to try them because they won't interfere with your treatment. Remember, though, that if it seems too good to be true, it probably is.
7. Exercise. Regular exercise will help overall health and mood, and may help reduce the risk of recurrence.
8. Pay attention to your diet. You will feel best if you eat healthy foods, but also allow yourself to splurge.
9. Place at least one pleasurable thing on your calendar every day.
10. Find things to celebrate. Honor both extraordinary and ordinary moments in life--like your first haircut after chemo!
11. If possible, plan a vacation. A change of scenery will remind you the world is large.
12. Find a cancer buddy, support group or therapist to talk about your feelings during recovery.
13. If you think you might be depressed, find a therapist who has experience working with cancer survivors. You can also call the cancer center and ask to speak to a social worker or the survivorship navigator.

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# So You're OK Now?

Diagnosed with early-stage breast cancer in 2016 at age 29, Jen Hodson turned to social media to cope. She is creator of the Rogue Boob blog, [featured](#) on CancerHealth.com.

March 18, 2019 By [Jen Hodson](#)

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I get asked the whole “So you’re OK now?” question a lot. And I don’t blame people for asking. We’re a big-picture society. We want the abridged version, the snapshot, the 60-second update, and then we want to move on.

“How’s the cancer?” “Well, I’m in remission but...” “Fantastic, that’s great news, so glad to hear” and so on and so forth until we land on a more pleasant conversational topic.

I’m more than a year and a half out from treatment and had my two-year diagnosiversary this past November. My hair has grown back to a socially acceptable length, and my surgeries are (for the most part) over with. No real physical remnants of treatment can be seen—unless you’re looking for them, and then you might spot some peculiar scars.

But I don’t really know if I’m OK. Sometimes I think I am; sometimes I think I’m falling into a pit of despair that I can’t get out of.

A lot goes into an early-stage cancer diagnosis, and I’m not sure the world recognizes the amount of recovery needed. So I’d like to outline some of the difficulties I face while in recovery. I’m going to break it down into the three categories symbolized in the tattoo on my arm: mind, body and soul.

Mind:

- PTSD
- Panic and anxiety attacks
- Inability to sleep
- Constant fear
- Memory loss
- Reduction in sharpness (chemo brain)
- Inability to concentrate or multitask

- Mood changes
- Loss of self-confidence

#### Body:

- Side effects of medications (weight gain, bloating)
- Various scars
- Phantom itching
- Nerve pain
- Reduced flexibility
- Achy joints
- Severe lethargy and chronic fatigue
- Complete overhaul of sexual function

#### Soul:

- Isolation and detachment
- Fear of connecting (How do I explain this to a partner?)
- Loss of identity (Who am I now?)
- Loneliness (Who can understand me?)
- Compassion fatigue on the part of friends and family

This list is depressing. But it is what it is. Every day I strive to work on solutions, possibilities, motivating chats with myself—to get through these difficulties and try to feel “OK” again. And there is so much promise that I am healing more and more every day. In fact, I trained for and completed the 2018 New York City Marathon, and I plan to run another one this year. But just because I’m in remission and I look more like I used to, I don’t necessarily know if I’m actually doing all right.

So my advice would be: Don’t ask me if I’m OK now. Just ask me how I’m doing. Ask me how I’m feeling. I promise to keep it short and sweet. And I promise to be honest. Because if you don’t want to hear it, you shouldn’t have asked.

## Recommended Survivorship Books

*After you Ring the Bell... 10 Challenges for the Cancer Survivor* by Anne Katz

*Surviving After Cancer: Living the New Normal* by Anne Katz

*The American Cancer Society New Healthy Eating Cookbook* by Jeanne Besser

*The New York Times Picture Your Life After Cancer* edited by Karen Barrow, forward by Tara Parker-Pope

*After Cancer Care* by Gerald M Lemole, MD, Pallav K Mehta, MD, Dwight L McKee, MD, Forward by Mehmet C. Oz, MD

*Picking Up the Pieces: Moving Forward After Surviving Cancer* by Sherri Magee, PhD and Kathy Scalzo, MSOD

*American Cancer Society Complete Guide to Nutrition for Cancer Survivors: 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* by Barbara L. Grant, MS, RD, CSO, LD, Abby S Bloch, PhD, RD, Kathryn H. Hamilton, MA, RD, CSO, CDN, Cynthia A. Thompson, PhD, RD, CSO

*What Helped Get Me Through: Cancer Survivors Share Wisdom and Hope* Edited by Julie K. Silver, MD