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# TALKING:

## THE BEST KEPT SECRET FOR NAVIGATING RELATIONSHIPS



### WHY COMMUNICATION MATTERS

Communication is especially important for couples following a diagnosis of metastatic breast cancer because each part of the couple — the person living with cancer and the supporting partner — is under intense strain. There is often a natural tendency to bottle up feelings of fear, pain, and anxiety to protect your partner, or yourself, but according to experts, not communicating is what drives people apart.

So, if there is a “secret sauce” to help navigate life with metastatic breast cancer, particularly as it relates to intimacy, romance and relationships, it’s talking.

Here’s a look at what we’ve heard from women in the metastatic breast cancer (MBC) community about how communicating has challenged them, helped them, and ultimately, brought them closer than ever to their partners and loved ones.

“If you don’t talk to each other, you become isolated.”

— Psychotherapist specializing in breast cancer

“To psych myself up to talk about the tough topics, I remind myself that in the history of our relationship, it’s better once we have talked about things.”

“One day I sat him down and told him nothing he could say would hurt me, but not talking to me was hurting my feelings. Now I’d say communication is the key to our happiness and success as a couple.”

“Nothing says I love you more than hugging your partner and speaking your heart’s truth.”

— MBC community voices



## THE IMPORTANCE OF INTIMACY

Intimacy can be one of the biggest changes and challenges to relationships after diagnosis. Day-to-day life can be taken over by the fundamentals of doctor's appointments, filling prescriptions, sticking to a medical regimen, and making sure to get enough rest.

In addition, it can be hard to get the information you need to deal with intimacy issues. Many women feel their doctors don't bring up the topic as much as they should during appointments or even that they didn't realize a decreased libido was likely to be a side effect of treatment. Though they are hard issues to discuss, it is important to share with your partner what is happening in your body and mind.

Remember that intimacy does not necessarily mean sexual intercourse. There are lots of ways to feel connected to another person. For many people, real romance is just being together and showing up for one another.

"I lose my hair, breasts, fertility; it is a constant taking. He fills those spaces with other things to do, and his hope is inspiring and contagious."

"One day my husband took me to a mirror, which I had been avoiding. He said, 'I don't care what you look like, I love you.' I knew at that moment we were in for the long haul."

"It is the unspoken journey. I'm like is this change happening to you too? What do I do?"

— MBC community voices



## THE BURDEN OF GUILT

Many women living with metastatic breast cancer have said they experience feelings of guilt at some point. They might feel bad about asking their partner to take on new roles and responsibilities, or feel undeserving of their partner's company and support. Some women also sense they have imposed a lifestyle change on their partner or feel guilty because they cannot have children. The best thing to do is talk about those feelings with your partner and discuss possible solutions that work for both of you. You may just find their answers reassuring.

“ I felt really guilty in the beginning when I couldn't do anything. I thought, how can I ask him to do any more than he is already doing?”

“ There is so much goodness between us that cancer cannot get no matter where it spreads. I know that is what he sees and why he stays with me.”

— MBC community voices

