

# Fearing Recurrence Coping With the Anxiety that Cancer May Return

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ROCKFORD - Receiving news of a cancer diagnosis is a devastating reality for many people every day. There's not only worry about the future, and the impact your diagnosis may have on loved ones, but also the concern about treatments, side effects and a host of many other fears. Once those hurdles are overcome and remission is in sight, another cause for anxiety creeps up: the fear of recurrence. Will my cancer return?

"A fear of recurrence is a phenomenon for someone who's gone through cancer treatment," says Lisa Bruno, oncology nurse navigator, for OSF HealthCare. "It doesn't seem to hit everyone the same way, and some people more concerned about their cancer coming back than others. It doesn't seem to be cancer specific, but I have noticed working as a navigator that pretty much everyone I have ever worked with has the fear of this cancer coming back. Have I done enough to keep this cancer from coming back?"

While the fear of recurrence is real for all cancer survivors, it's especially heightened for women dealing with breast cancer. October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Bruno is not only an oncology nurse navigator, but she is also a breast cancer survivor herself and can relate on a personal level to the anxiety that many of her patients experience along their journey.

"They are the caregivers, generally, of the family," says Bruno. "They don't have time for this cancer to come back. I encourage them to do all the treatments they can that are appropriate for them. Even if something was to come back with their breast cancer down the line, there are so many advances today that are continuing with more targeted treatments that they might be eligible for down the line. I'm not so scared of a recurrence because there continues to be new developments out there for treatment."

According to Bruno, the concern can be a paralyzing fear or have a PTSD-like effect. But there are many ways cancer survivors can manage this anxiety in order to live a full and content life without the constant worry about a possible recurrence.

"Some good ways to get over the fear of recurrence or at least figure out a way to live with it and make it a part of your daily life is find some support," says Bruno. "Whether it's online, in-person, ask your providers if they have any suggestions for support. Maybe it's your faith community. Maybe it's a close friend you've had for a long time and it might not be anyone in your family, but just someone you can count on to be there, to listen to you when you need it."

Other suggestions include:

- Seeking counseling
- Trying meditation, yoga or writing in a journal
- Maintaining a healthy diet/get plenty of sleep
- Continuing to be proactive about medical care
- Focusing on enjoying life

The bottom line, Bruno says, is that any fear about a return of cancer is a normal part of the journey. The key is tackling those fears head on and find ways that provide a sense of peace moving forward. As time goes on -- weeks, months and years later -- the fear of recurrence does subside for most people.

The cancer diagnosis has rocked your world once. You sure don't want it to happen again," says Bruno. "Your best bet is to follow through with the treatments that are recommended. Seek support and guidance from your providers afterwards and find

somebody, whether it's a group or an individual, that you can trust to lay out these fears. I can't stress enough that it is a very normal thing to happen, but it doesn't have to rule your life."

For more information on cancer care, visit [OSF HealthCare](#).