

FLORENCE AND JOSEPH APPLEMAN  
EDUCATIONAL BOOKLET SERIES

# Facing Breast Cancer as a Jewish Woman



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# Facing Breast Cancer

as a Jewish Woman

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## GET TO KNOW SHARSHERET

Sharsheret supports Jewish women and families facing breast cancer and ovarian cancer at every stage — before, during, and after diagnosis.

Our name, Sharsheret, means “chain” in Hebrew and represents the strong, nurturing connections we build to support Jewish women and their families at every stage of breast cancer and ovarian cancer. We help women and families connect to our community in the way that feels most comfortable, taking into consideration their stage of life, diagnosis, or treatment, as well as their connection to Judaism. We also provide educational resources and create programs for women and families to improve their quality of life.

We understand that young Jewish women have unique concerns when it comes to breast cancer and ovarian cancer, and we are the only organization that specializes in serving them. Our programs are easy to access. From Boston to Burbank, Milwaukee to Miami, Sharsheret is wherever you are.

Sharsheret is a growing community of women and families. Together, we are creating a chain of strong links that reaches across the country so that no woman or family of Jewish descent needs to face the challenges of breast cancer or ovarian cancer alone.

Visit [www.sharsheret.org](http://www.sharsheret.org) or call us at **866.474.2774** to participate in our programs and to become a link in the Sharsheret chain. All inquiries are confidential and answered by qualified staff who can help.

## OUR PROGRAMS

### The Link Program®

- **Peer Support Network**, connecting women newly diagnosed or at high risk of developing breast cancer or ovarian cancer one-on-one with others who share similar diagnoses and experiences
- **The Margot Rosenberg Pulitzer and Sheri Rosenberg Embrace™ Program**, supporting women living with advanced breast cancer or recurrent ovarian cancer
- **Genetics for Life®**, addressing hereditary breast cancer and ovarian cancer
- **Busy Box®**, for parents facing breast cancer or ovarian cancer while raising children or teens
- **The Bella Chachky Diamond and Sylvia Diamond Geller Best Face Forward Program®**, addressing the cosmetic side effects of treatment
- **Best Face Forward 2.0**, providing services and financial subsidies to enhance women's quality of life
- **The Florence & Laurence Spungen Family Foundation Family Focus® Program**, providing resources and support for caregivers and family members
- **Ovarian Cancer Program**, tailored resources and support for young Jewish women and families facing ovarian cancer
- **Sharsheret Supports™**, developing local support groups and programs
- **Thriving Again®**, providing individualized support, education, and survivorship plans for young breast cancer survivors

### Education and Outreach Programs

- **Health Care Webinars**, on issues unique to younger women and Jewish women facing breast cancer and ovarian cancer
- **Sharsheret on Campus™**, outreach and education to students on campus
- **Sharsheret Educational Resource Booklet Series**, culturally relevant publications for Jewish women, their families, and health care professionals

## YOU ARE NOT ALONE

A diagnosis of breast cancer can be overwhelming for any woman. For women of Jewish heritage, its grip may extend to family, community, dating, fertility, marriage, parenting, and religious or cultural life. Though you may confront many of the same issues as other women facing breast cancer, it can feel like a lonely journey.

You are not alone. Thousands of Jewish women are living with breast cancer today — juggling medical appointments as they struggle with concerns about breast cancer genetics, cope with the impact of a breast cancer diagnosis on their careers, or prepare spiritually and physically for the holidays. Their experiences are reflected in these pages.

This booklet raises awareness about the issues Jewish women may face in their fight against breast cancer and the resources available to help address those concerns. These pages highlight some of the difficulties shared by women who have called

Sharsheret for information and support. You may identify with some of the issues addressed in this guide, while others may not be relevant to you. Whatever they may be, your questions and concerns are likely shared by others in the Sharsheret community.

Sometimes we need information and support beyond what our family and friends can provide. The Resource Directory in this booklet will help you

identify many Jewish organizations and cancer organizations that are available to you as well as to your family and friends. This booklet is not intended to provide comprehensive medical information, but many of the breast cancer organizations listed in the Resource Directory can help you locate information you may need over time. The Resource Directory is organized by subject so that you can easily access the organizations that will be most useful in addressing your particular needs.

Be assured that regardless of where you are in your journey with breast cancer, Sharsheret is there to support you, your family, and friends.

**Your own questions and concerns are likely shared by others in Sharsheret's community.**

## BREAST CANCER GENETICS

“My grandmother and aunt were both diagnosed with breast cancer. When I was diagnosed, I wanted to understand more about hereditary breast cancer so that I could determine the best treatment plan for me. Then I began to worry about my sisters and my daughters. With the information I have gathered, I can begin to make important decisions for my family.” — Julia.

Like Julia, many women of Jewish descent contact Sharsheret with concerns about a history of breast cancer or ovarian cancer in their family. No study to date has shown that breast cancer is more common in women of Jewish descent than in the population at large. However, more Jewish men and women carry genetic alterations such as BRCA 1, BRCA 2, ATM, CHEK2, PALB2 or Lynch Syndrome, any of which may predispose you to a variety of cancers including breast, ovarian, male breast, colon, pancreatic, prostate, uterine, and melanoma.

Specifically, 1 in 40 individuals of Ashkenazi (Central and Eastern European) Jewish descent, compared to 1 in 345 individuals in the general population, carries an alteration in what are referred to as the BRCA1 or BRCA2 genes. These alterations can be passed on through either parent to the next generation. Scientists are beginning to study the hereditary nature of breast cancer and ovarian cancer in families of Sephardic (Spanish, Portuguese, and North African) Jewish descent. Some families with extensive histories of cancer may want to consider a multi gene panel testing that includes BRCA1, BRCA2, ATM, CHEK2, PALB2, and Lynch Syndrome. While not all

individuals who carry an altered gene will develop breast cancer or ovarian cancer, recent studies suggest that the risk that someone who carries an altered gene will develop breast cancer over her lifetime may be as high as 82% and for developing ovarian cancer as high as 44%.

**Alterations in BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes can be passed on by either parent to the next generation.**

A certified genetic counselor can help you understand your family history and its impact, if any, on your surgery and treatment decisions. Sharsheret's support staff is available to answer your general questions about hereditary breast cancer so you can determine if in-depth genetic counseling or genetic testing is right for you. You can also find a list of additional resources for breast cancer genetics in the Resource Directory on page 24 of this booklet.

## PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

“My instincts told me to ‘stay private.’ I worried that I would be labeled as someone who was untouchable. I would peek through the window of the doctor’s office to see if I knew anyone before I went in. I didn’t want to be pitied and I didn’t want people talking about me. The stress of keeping private was almost worse than being sick. I never appreciated people and the power of connecting to others. It is tremendously healing, just having people around you.” — Aliza

Living in a close-knit community can be a wonderful source of support for those facing illness. For some women though, breast cancer is an experience they would prefer to approach privately. Others are concerned about the impact of a cancer diagnosis on their place in the community — their own marriage prospects or those of their children. For you, privacy and confidentiality may be a critical component of support. At the same time, you may recognize the benefits of connecting with family members, friends, and others who have shared a similar experience.

There are breast cancer organizations and Jewish organizations that offer resources and support with the degree of confidentiality you require, including Sharsheret. If you, like Aliza, are concerned about confidentiality, consider asking the organizations you contact to specify the ways in which they can accommodate your privacy needs. At Sharsheret, we are sensitive to the concerns of those who contact us to receive or offer their support, and we are committed to accommodating your requests for confidentiality. If you prefer not to receive Sharsheret labeled envelopes in the mail, we will

arrange to ship you materials in plain white envelopes. You can choose to use only your first name or a name of your choosing when contacting us. If you prefer not to share your name or speak with other women who live in your neighborhood, we will respect these requests as well. When we call you, we can use discretion when leaving a message with another person or on voicemail.

**Privacy and confidentiality may be a critical component of support for you.**

Sharsheret can help you find the balance in your life between the need for confidentiality and the need for community support. We want you to feel free to share with us any other privacy concerns that you might have. Many women in the Sharsheret **Peer Support Network** have experienced these concerns and we can connect you with one who will be happy to share her story and how she found balance between privacy and support.



## COMMUNITY SUPPORT

“It was uncomfortable to accept help from friends and family, but ultimately very important. I had the opportunity to feel the love and support that comes from the community. And I knew that no matter how I was feeling, there would always be someone to take care of me and my family. I was not alone, and knowing that was a very powerful feeling.” — Amy

As women, many of us may experience difficulty asking for assistance and support when we need it. We tend to think of ourselves as the ones who take care of others. As part of a community that values making the world a better place (tikun olam) and giving to others (tzedakah), asking for help or accepting assistance can often be even more difficult for a Jewish woman facing breast cancer. Some of the women in the Sharsheret community describe

how uncomfortable it can feel to be on the receiving end of another person’s good deeds. Others take comfort in being part of a close-knit community that will offer to prepare meals, tend to children, and help with shopping and housekeeping. Understanding that friends and family members feel empowered when they are useful to you can often make their offers of assistance easier to accept.

*Continued on page 8.*



## COMMUNITY SUPPORT (CONTINUED)

Serving the broad spectrum of the Jewish community, Bikur Cholim organizations and Jewish Family and Children's Agencies offer assistance to those facing illness. Visiting the sick (bikur cholim) is a term encompassing a wide range of activities performed by an individual or a group to comfort and support people who are in need.

If you are in need of community support during breast cancer treatment, you can contact Bikur Cholim organizations in your area. Many of these organizations offer assistance with meals, transportation, hospital visits, child care, counseling, and home care. For a state-by-state listing of Bikur Cholim organizations, visit the Partners in Health/Bikur Cholim website listed in the Resource Directory on page 24 of this booklet.

Another resource you may find helpful is the Jewish Family and Children's Agency which provides social services to children, adults, and the elderly in the Jewish and general community. Links to your local Jewish Family and Children's Agency can be found on the Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies website listed in the Resource Directory on page 24 of this booklet. Some Jewish Family and Children's Agencies have partnered with Sharsheret to provide breast cancer and ovarian cancer support groups and programs in local communities.

**Balancing delegation and independence ensures that your needs are met in the way that is most comfortable for you.**

Sharsheret offers assistance to your support system through **The Spungen Foundation Family Focus® Program**. Available to family and friends, our staff provides encouragement and additional resources to the people who are there for you.



## LIVING SINGLE

“When I was first diagnosed, I panicked. Who will marry me? Will I ever be able to have children? I felt overwhelmed by having to manage the breast cancer ordeal without a partner — someone to discuss treatment decisions and surgery options with, someone to care for me when I cannot care for myself. It made all the difference when I realized that there were other young women out there living with breast cancer; women I could speak with over the telephone who could help me understand what to expect.” — Marcia

Breast cancer can feel overwhelming for a woman at any stage of life. Facing cancer as a single Jewish woman like Marcia can raise a series of unique challenges. Single women who have called Sharsheret have done so to discuss a host of issues, including:

- Establishing a consistent support system of friends and family members
  - The difficulty of possibly moving back home to be cared for by loved ones
  - How to navigate the growing financial demands that may arise
  - How to begin dating again
  - When and how to tell a prospective partner that you have or have had cancer
  - Concerns about the impact of breast cancer treatment on fertility and the ability to conceive a child
  - Support groups that are sensitive to the unique needs of single women
- Outreach programs that focus on the needs of single women of Jewish heritage

For the single Orthodox Jewish woman, covering her head for the first time due to cancer treatment side effects rather than religious ritual after marriage can also be emotionally difficult.

If you would like to talk to other single women in your Sharsheret community to learn how they handled some of these issues, we can connect you with a member of our **Peer Support Network**. Often, being able to share your concerns with someone else who has faced similar challenges can be very helpful.

## RELATIONSHIPS AND MARRIAGE

“Surgery had a serious impact on my body image and sense of self-esteem. I was worried about how my husband would perceive me. I felt a sense of loss, and it was painful and embarrassing for me. We both worried about the future of my health and needed to adjust to this significant change in our relationship. I found it very reassuring when we were both able to discuss our feelings openly.” — Joanna

A diagnosis of breast cancer can impact a committed relationship. Busy with medical appointments and often fatigued as a result of treatment, many women find that they do not have the time or energy that they are accustomed to spending in their relationships. Partners may need to assume additional household or child care responsibilities. Some women express concerns that their partners require support but do not have others with whom they feel comfortable discussing breast cancer. Changes in one’s physical appearance as a result of surgery or chemotherapy may affect body image. These feelings can be difficult to discuss with a partner and may affect intimacy, both emotionally and sexually, as they did for Joanna.

There are breast cancer organizations and Jewish organizations that can address your concerns about the impact of breast cancer on life with your partner. Many organizations can provide direct support to your partner, or provide you with resources that may

be helpful to share. Others can provide household help or child care assistance. You can find a list of these organizations in the Resource Directory on page 25 of this booklet.

Your Sharsheret community includes many other women who have dealt with the issues surrounding intimate relationships and marriage. Perhaps their experiences can help you put yours in perspective. Contact us to get connected to someone in our **Peer Support Network** who has shared your concerns. Our **The Spungen Foundation Family Focus® Program** is also available to provide support and additional resources to your partner.



## FERTILITY, PREGNANCY, AND NURSING

“When I was first diagnosed, I was afraid I was going to become infertile and childless. Before chemotherapy, I visited doctors and asked important questions about the impact of breast cancer treatment on my fertility. I made decisions that I feel good about. It was an extremely stressful time, but I know I did the best research I could.” — Wendy

The emphasis in Jewish tradition and culture on the importance of family makes the impact of breast cancer treatment on fertility a particularly important concern for Jewish women, both single and married. Prior to beginning treatment, you may have questions about your ability to have children after cancer treatment.

Like Wendy, you may find it helpful to explore these questions with your doctor prior to making health care decisions. Many women begin treatment with questions about their ability to have children after cancer, particularly after they learn that chemotherapy can induce premature menopause. Others are concerned about the effects of chemotherapy agents on subsequent pregnancies. Some women are concerned about the effects of breast cancer treatment during pregnancy or while nursing, and about the effects of pregnancy on the recurrence of breast cancer. If a woman has had a mastectomy, she may feel sadness about the loss of the ability to nurse her baby. Still others may be concerned about possible hereditary aspects of their breast cancer and what this might mean for their children.

In addition to speaking with your doctor, there are cancer organizations, Jewish organizations, and fertility organizations that can help you understand the impact of breast cancer treatment on fertility and your family planning options beyond breast cancer. You can find a list of these organizations in the Resource Directory on page 26 of this booklet.

**The importance of family in Jewish tradition and culture makes the impact of breast cancer treatment on fertility a particularly important concern.**

At Sharsheret, we are sensitive to concerns about fertility, pregnancy, and nursing and can connect you with other women with breast cancer in our **Peer Support Network** who have faced these issues. Their experiences may help you better understand your own.

## PARENTING

“I had five young daughters when I was diagnosed with breast cancer. My big concern was continuing my energetic lifestyle, being there for homework, eating dinner together, giving them their baths. I didn’t know what to tell my children, and I worried about how my illness and treatment would affect their lives. Ultimately, I put a lot of effort into keeping their lives normal. Although there were days I felt very tired, I made it my focus to save my energy for the Mommy moments.” — Daniella

For many women like Daniella, questions about how to best parent through breast cancer are of significant concern. Some women seek guidance about discussing breast cancer with young children and teenagers or how to keep up with an active family life when not feeling well. Other women who are eager to keep their diagnosis private look for help in addressing the needs of their children through cancer treatment and beyond. Still others have concerns about what their hereditary breast cancer diagnosis might mean for their children, or how and when to discuss this issue with them.

There are cancer organizations that can help you determine the best ways to approach cancer with your family, and Jewish organizations that can provide family counseling and guidance at little or no cost to you. You can find a list of these organizations in the Resource Directory on page 24 of this booklet.

Sharsheret offers the Busy Box®, which provides children and teens with materials and activities and helps support parents facing breast cancer or ovarian cancer. You can also talk to other members of Sharsheret’s **Peer Support Network** who have dealt with similar concerns, can share their experiences with you, and will provide you with support as you work through these important parenting concerns. You may also find How Do We Care for Our Children?, a Sharsheret symposium transcript available on our website, to be helpful. If you do not have access to the internet, you can call our office to request a copy.

**You can set the tone for how your children will respond to your cancer diagnosis.**



## SPIRITUALITY AND WELLBEING

“Throughout my diagnosis and treatment, I found myself asking: What is there to learn from these challenges? How might I garner the strength to face what lies ahead? When will I believe that this experience is just one more fold in the fabric of my life? In grappling with these questions, I discovered that my spiritual life helped carry me through.” — Fran

Spirituality can be the way we find meaning, hope, comfort, and inner peace in our lives. Many people find spirituality through religion. Some find it through music, art, or a connection with nature. Others find it in their values and principles.

Positive feelings, comfort, and strength gained from spirituality can contribute to a sense of wellbeing. Improving your spiritual health may help you feel better and help you cope with the stress of treatment.

Whatever your path, a breast cancer diagnosis may prompt you to ask life’s ultimate questions and to begin a quest for meaning. The nature of this emotional and spiritual journey is fluid. Finding meaning in this journey can mean embracing the range of emotions you experience and accepting that there will be times when you feel less connected spiritually, and other times, more connected. Whether or not you’ve previously had a spiritual connection to Jewish tradition for meaning and guidance, you may find that now the idea of this connection has increased meaning.

Like Fran, many Jewish women facing breast cancer have found support in speaking to rabbis or other Jewish communal leaders about incorporating spirituality, Jewish tradition, and ritual into their lives as they cope with the emotional and physical impact of breast cancer.

**It’s important for your doctor to know how your spirituality might affect your feelings and your health care decisions.**

There are also Jewish organizations, both observant and secular, that can help you find meaningful ways to integrate spirituality and Jewish tradition into your cancer journey, in a way that is comfortable for you. Additionally, through Sharsheret’s **Peer Support Network**, we can connect you with another woman with similar spiritual views who will be happy to share her experiences.

## EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

“When I was diagnosed with breast cancer, everything in my life became completely overwhelming. I felt like I was on a rollercoaster ride and I needed to learn how to cope with many new changes that came my way. While terrifying and unnerving at times, I needed to implement new strategies and coping tools into my daily routine in order to regain my control to move forward, reprioritize and focus on one day at a time.” – Jody

A cancer diagnosis can create many upheavals, leading you to feeling like things are out of control. Sometimes we think we have more control than we actually do and cancer has a way of stripping that illusion away. That can be especially disconcerting.

One of the most consistent findings in health psychology research is that people going through difficult experiences report better quality of life than they might expect. We are flexible. We do adapt. It doesn't happen overnight, but we do get there. Adapting means redefining what quality of life means to you based on your body and your situation as it is now, in the present. It doesn't mean that you're always going to be this way; it may shift as you are making your way through chemotherapy, through surgery and through recovery.

Ask yourself:

- “What’s important to you now?” This is reassessing your priorities.
- “What’s your measure of a good day? What does quality of life mean to you today?” This can shift from moment to moment.
- “What can you do? What’s going well?”

There are different ways of allowing room to redefine what’s going to make a good day and to shift your perspective. Some examples are:

- Cognitive behavioral therapy
- Meditation and yoga
- Exercise
- Expressive writing
- Talking to other people
- Social support



# EMOTIONAL WELLBEING (CONTINUED)

Cancer is like a roller coaster. Trying to stop the roller coaster and get away from all the ups and down of your feelings can essentially be like trying to get away from yourself. You do have control about how you relate to your thoughts, and you can offer every thought that comes to you an equal amount of compassion. This open compassionate feeling towards your own experience can help you move towards living fully and well whether in the middle of treatment or through the survivorship years.

Through Sharsheret's **Peer Support Network**, you can connect with other women who have been through a similar experience and can provide you with support as you move forward. Should you have any additional questions or concerns related to your emotional wellbeing, please contact your health care provider.



## PRAYER AND MEDITATION

“During treatment, I sought a way to focus that would be healing. Choosing prayers that were meaningful to me helped me envision the words nurturing my body and creating a healing environment.”

— Elaine

Like Elaine, many Jewish women living through breast cancer turn to prayer or meditation for a sense of spirituality and healing during treatment and beyond. Through these practices, women often describe feeling more hopeful about the future, more centered in their life circumstance, and more connected to their community. Prayer and meditation may also provide a quiet and reflective time to momentarily put aside concerns during breast cancer treatment.

Some women turn to a rabbi or spiritual leader for assistance in selecting meaningful prayers. Other women have selected prayers or meditations they find particularly comforting or that hold personal significance for them. Family members and friends may feel empowered by organizing a prayer

group, and many community groups gather to recite psalms (tehillim) for those facing breast cancer. Hosting a celebration of thanks (seudat hoda'ah) can mark a

**Prayer and meditation may provide a quiet and reflective time to center yourself and find your balance.**

closure to treatment and a beginning to healing. Whether you are observant or secular, including meditation or prayer in your life may help you feel more balanced.

A list of organizations offering spiritual support during illness can be found in the Resource Directory on page 28 of this booklet. Jewish spiritual leaders in your community may also provide meaningful guidance. Through Sharsheret, you can also speak with other women in the Peer Support Network who share views similar to yours and have found prayer or meditation meaningful during their breast cancer journey.



# CELEBRATING HOLIDAYS

“I began chemotherapy treatment right around the time of Rosh Hashanah. It was challenging to prepare for guests when I felt numb and disconnected from the routine of Jewish life. But that year, my prayers took on greater meaning as I prayed for healing, for health, and for a long life of celebrations. Though the holidays brought with them a roller coaster of emotions — fear, anxiety, and deep sadness — they also created some moments of true calm and connection to the friends and family whose support proved invaluable.” — Jessica

As they did for Jessica, Jewish holidays can provide meaningful opportunities for family and friends to celebrate together, bringing us closer to loved ones. The holidays can also be an important time of deepening spirituality and self-reflection, and a reminder of the cycle of life and the year.

Preparing for and celebrating Jewish holidays or other rituals with family and friends can create feelings of warmth and security during a time of life that may feel unstable. But whether secular or religious, for Jewish women facing breast cancer, navigating the physical and emotional demands of the holidays may also make these trying

times. Some women find general holiday preparations — shopping, cooking, and cleaning — physically taxing. Others do not feel emotionally ready to celebrate. The High Holy Days (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur), in particular, can bring with them added anxiety about the uncertain future as the New Year approaches.

**The holidays can be an important time of deepening spirituality and self-reflection**

Your Sharsheret community understands the joys and demands of holiday celebrations — both Jewish and secular — while facing breast cancer. Call us to get connected to a member of the **Peer Support Network** who can share with you how she handled the joys and challenges of her holiday experiences.



## WORKING DURING TREATMENT

“Continuing to work during breast cancer treatment was extremely challenging. Managing a family, a job, medical appointments, and treatments was a very complex juggling act. At times, especially during the holidays and preparing for Shabbat, I felt as though nothing was getting 100% of the attention it deserved.” — Aviva

Working during breast cancer treatment can be both normalizing and challenging. Like Aviva, many women find that continuing to work gives them a sense of purpose and a routine in an otherwise chaotic schedule of medical appointments. For some women, it is a financial necessity. Working through treatment can also pose challenges, including sharing one’s diagnosis with employers and co-workers, juggling work responsibilities and appointments, and the impact of treatment side effects — including fatigue — on work performance. Some women have also noted the added pressure of balancing work schedules with the responsibilities of preparing for the Jewish holidays and the Sabbath during treatment.

There are organizations that can help you, your employer, and your co-workers address some of the challenges that may arise at work during your breast cancer treatment. They offer guidance on sharing the news, managing side effects, and your

rights in the workplace. You can find a list of these organizations in the Resource Directory on page 26 of this booklet.

**There are resources to help you juggle work, treatment, schedules, and your personal life.**

Sharsheret’s Bella Chachky Diamond and Sylvia Diamond Geller Best Face Forward® Program can help ease your transition back to work by addressing some of the cosmetic side effects of breast cancer treatment. Additionally, the **Peer Support Network** can connect you with other women who have faced the challenges of juggling work, treatment, and the other demands of life.



## USING THE RITUAL BATH

“Using the ritual bath (mikvah) for the first time after surgery was an emotional experience. Standing alone in the mirrored and brightly-lit preparation room, I was anxious about the attendant’s reaction upon seeing my scars. I carefully warned her, even though at the time it was difficult for me to discuss my diagnosis. How much more whole I felt after each mikvah visit, when the gentle attendants treated me just like they always had before.” — Leila

Whether or not you have ever used a mikvah previously, some women find that immersion can be a meaningful way to prepare for treatment after a diagnosis of cancer, or to mark the beginning of healing after the end of treatment.

Whether returning to the mikvah like Leila, or using one for the first time, women often experience a range of emotions. Some women may view their time in the water as one of heightened spirituality or as an opportunity for reflection. At the same time, the prospect of using the ritual bath after surgery or during chemotherapy treatment can be accompanied by anxiety and vulnerability about exposure of surgical scars or hair loss. Many women find it helpful to call the mikvah in advance to speak with the attendant, or to make arrangements for a private appointment. It can also be comforting to recognize that mikvah attendants are generally sensitive to the needs of all women living with illness.

Several communities across the country offer “Healing Waters” spiritual support groups at their local mikvah. For more information, please contact the organizations addressing spirituality listed in the Resource Directory on page 28 of this booklet. In addition, Sharsheret’s **Peer Support Network** can connect you with other women who have shared similar mikvah experiences and can talk with you about your thoughts, concerns, and questions.

**Some women find immersion in the ritual bath to be a meaningful way to prepare for treatment or to mark the completion of treatment.**

## HOLISTIC, COMPLEMENTARY, AND INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE

“I’m hearing so much about the impact of poor nutrition and a lack of exercise as contributors to a diagnosis of cancer. Did I cause my own illness? I can’t focus on this recurring thought. Instead, I think, how can I allow complementary interventions, nutrition, and exercise contribute to my healing?” — Hannah

Judaism addresses the importance of collectively caring for our minds, bodies, and souls. Proper nutrition, exercise, and good sleeping habits are also strongly valued and contribute to a sound mind and body. Mindful meditation, yoga, and prayer are other activities that women undertake in order to help heal physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

For some women, changing lifestyle habits such as nutrition, exercise, and engaging in mindful meditation are easy next steps in the pursuit of holistic health. But there may be others who feel similarly to Hannah; you know that there are complementary interventions but feel overwhelmed with the responsibility of making the right choices or any choices at all. For many Jewish women, this is particularly true when food choices are the issue. Food is so much a part of our culture that giving up those “comfort foods” that may not be the healthiest choices can be a challenge.

First and foremost, it is critical to consult your medical team when making any lifestyle changes or opting for complementary and holistic interventions. Some natural remedies or nutritional choices may interact with your medical treatments. Consult an expert when deciding on an exercise regimen. Speak with your rabbi or spiritual leader about prayers or meditations that will fill your soul. And finally, it’s important to pace yourself as you make lifestyle changes. Healthy living means finding the right balance in these three realms of mind, body, and soul.

**Be sure to consult your medical team when making lifestyle changes.**

Resources for more information about holistic, complementary and integrative medicine can be found in the Resource Directory on page 26 of this booklet.

## CLINICAL TRIALS IN A NEW AGE

“Clinical trials give me options and hope. Clinical trials should be considered a first choice and not a last choice approach to treatment. Participating in clinical trials has provided me with a customized approach to treatments based on my specific diagnosis and has allowed me to contribute to the cancer research community.” – Rachel

Clinical trials are research studies to find better ways to screen, prevent, detect, or treat diseases like cancer, and to help find ways to improve cancer care. Whether you are at risk, newly diagnosed, in treatment, or living with advanced cancer, you can consult with your health care team to find a clinical trial that can be right for you. Doctors hope that through clinical trials new interventions that offer better outcomes can be discovered.

One in 40 men and women of Ashkenazi (Central or Eastern European) Jewish descent carries a BRCA gene mutation, approximately 10 times the rate of the general population. Jewish women and families, particularly those with a BRCA gene mutation, may qualify for and benefit from BRCA specific trials that explore new, alternative treatment and surveillance methods.

As a Jewish woman, involvement in clinical trials may raise many questions and challenges that are important to discuss with your health care team and spiritual leader, such as:

- Questions relating to Jewish law and ethics.
- Balancing the schedule of a clinical trial with daily life and family responsibilities.
- Clinical trial requirements that conflict with holiday or Sabbath observance.
- Organizing a community of support to provide you with assistance during the clinical trial.

You may be worried about participating in a clinical trial due to lifestyle, religious or medical reasons. However, clinical approaches to treatment that allow doctors to create a customized approach. Health care professionals are able to discuss options with you and can answer any questions or concerns you may have regarding the trial, including about eligibility and treatment. In addition, you can contact Sharsheret to speak with a member of our support *Clinical Trials In A New Age* brochure, and to speak with a peer supporter through our **Peer Support Network** about her experience participating in a clinical trial.

## SURVIVORSHIP

“I find myself calculating how many more months until I no longer have to undergo breast cancer treatment. Though my efforts have been to put cancer behind me, I am learning, slowly, that it is much more important that I learn to walk comfortably beside cancer.” — Karen

Survivorship is a many-faceted framework that includes physical, psychological, functional, social, sexual, and spiritual wellbeing. The term “survivor” itself raises a number of questions: When exactly are you considered a breast cancer survivor? How often do you need to see the doctor once you have survived cancer? How do you reconcile the term “survivor” with that persistent voice in your head asking, “Is it going to come back? Is it just a matter of time?” For some Jewish women, even claiming the title of survivor may be uncomfortable as it is a term often associated with the Holocaust.

For women like Karen, who are contemplating their rights to the title “survivor,” on-going issues affecting family, friends, community, fertility, marriage, parenting, and spiritual or religious life remain a challenge. Many women feel internal pressure or pressure from others to return to being the person they were prior to their diagnosis. Often, great effort is put into maintaining normalcy during this time of life-altering changes. It’s not uncommon for women to feel emotionally intact during diagnosis

and treatment, but experience strong emotional reactions after active treatment is completed.

**Survivorship can include physical, emotional, and spiritual growth and changes.**

Sharsheret’s survivorship program, Thriving Again®, offers tailored support and resources, to help you navigate your unique survivorship journey.

You can also talk to other survivors in Sharsheret’s Peer Support Network who can help you find your “new normal” by sharing their survivorship experiences with you. Contact us to get connected with someone who understands and can address your concerns and questions.



## HOW CAN SHARSHERET HELP ME?

If you are at risk or have been diagnosed with breast cancer or ovarian cancer, we can help.

**Connect with others** who share your experience in our national Peer Support Network.

**Discuss genetic concerns** related to your family history and cancer risk with our support staff.

**Let us help you help your children** through your cancer journey with parenting resources.

**Create** a survivorship plan tailored to your unique needs.

**Join our program** for women living with advanced breast cancer or recurrent ovarian cancer.

**Learn** how to address the cosmetic side effects of cancer treatment.

**Call us** for resources and with questions from family members, caregivers, and friends.

Keep informed by experts in the cancer community on our national teleconferences and webinars.

We offer transcripts of Sharsheret's helpful symposia online at [www.sharsheret.org](http://www.sharsheret.org), covering topics such as *Taking Charge: Cancer Screening Updates Every Woman Needs to Know*, *The Whole Picture: A Holistic Approach to Breast Health and Breast Cancer* and *Breast Cancer and the Next Generation: Caring for Our Children*. Check our website for the continually updated list of relevant transcript topics. If you do not have access to the internet, you can call our office to request copies and learn about other relevant transcripts available to you.

For more information about Sharsheret's programs, please contact us toll-free at **866.474.2774** or at [info@sharsheret.org](mailto:info@sharsheret.org). Sharsheret's programs are free and are open to all women and men. All inquiries are confidential.

**Remember, wherever you are, Sharsheret is, and we will be there for as long as you need us.**

## RESOURCE DIRECTORY

### **Sharsheret**

866.474.2774

[www.sharsheret.org](http://www.sharsheret.org)

[info@sharsheret.org](mailto:info@sharsheret.org)

### **Jewish Organizations Addressing Cancer and Health-Related Issues**

#### **Association of Jewish Family and Children's Agencies**

800.634.7346

[www.ajfca.org](http://www.ajfca.org)

#### **Center for Jewish Genetics**

312.357.4718

[www.jewishgenetics.org](http://www.jewishgenetics.org)

#### **Chai Lifeline**

877.CHAI.LIFE

[www.chailifeline.org](http://www.chailifeline.org)

#### **Hadassah, Women's Health and Wellness**

888.303.3640

[www.hadassah.org](http://www.hadassah.org)

#### **National Center for Jewish Healing**

212.632.4500

[www.jbfcs.org](http://www.jbfcs.org)

#### **Nishmat: Women's Halachic Hotline and Online Information Center**

877.963.8938

[www.yoatzot.org](http://www.yoatzot.org)

#### **Partners in Health/Bikur Cholim**

845.425.7877

[www.bikurcholim.org](http://www.bikurcholim.org)

### **Breast Cancer Organizations**

#### **Breastcancer.org**

610.642.6550

[www.breastcancer.org](http://www.breastcancer.org)

#### **Dr. Susan Love Research Foundation**

310.828.0060

[www.dslrf.org](http://www.dslrf.org)

#### **Living Beyond Breast Cancer**

855.807.6386

888.753.5222 (Helpline)

[www.lbbc.org](http://www.lbbc.org)

#### **SHARE: Self-Help for Women with Breast or Ovarian Cancer**

866.ASK.SHARE

[www.sharecancersupport.org](http://www.sharecancersupport.org)

#### **Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation**

877.456.6636

[www.komen.org](http://www.komen.org)

#### **Triple Negative Breast Cancer Foundation**

877.880.TNBC

[www.tnbcfoundation.org](http://www.tnbcfoundation.org)

### **Young Women Facing Breast Cancer Stupid Cancer**

877.735.4673

[www.stupidcancer.org](http://www.stupidcancer.org)

#### **Ulman Foundation**

888.393.FUND

[Ulmanfoundation.org](http://Ulmanfoundation.org)

#### **Young Survival Coalition**

877.YSC.1011

[www.youngsurvival.org](http://www.youngsurvival.org)

### **Cancer Organizations**

#### **ACOR (Association of Online Cancer Resources)**

[www.acor.org](http://www.acor.org)

#### **American Cancer Society**

800.ACS.2345

[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

#### **Cancer101**

646.638.2202

[www.cancer101.org](http://www.cancer101.org)

#### **CancerCare**

800.813.HOPE

[www.cancerca.org](http://www.cancerca.org)

**Cancer Hope Network**

877.HOPE.NET  
800.552.4366 (Helpline)  
[www.cancerhopenetwork.org](http://www.cancerhopenetwork.org)

**Cancer.Net**

888.651.3038  
[www.cancer.net](http://www.cancer.net)

**Cancer Support Community**

888.793.9355  
[www.cancersupportcommunity.org](http://www.cancersupportcommunity.org)

**Imerman Angels**

866.IMERMAN  
[www.imermanangels.org](http://www.imermanangels.org)

**National Cancer Institute**

800.4.CANCER  
[www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

**Breast Cancer Genetics****Genetics For Life  
(A Sharsheret Program)**

866.474.2774  
[www.sharsheret.org](http://www.sharsheret.org)

**Bright Pink**

312.787.4412  
[www.brightpink.org](http://www.brightpink.org)

**FORCE: Facing Our risk of Cancer  
Empowered**

866.288.RISK  
[www.facingourrisk.org](http://www.facingourrisk.org)

**National Society of Genetic Counselors**

312.321.6834  
[www.nsgc.org](http://www.nsgc.org)

**NCI Cancer Genetics Services Directory**

800.4.CANCER  
[www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/genetics/directory](http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/genetics/directory)

**Family and Friends****Busy Box (A Sharsheret Program)**

866.474.2774  
[www.sharsheret.org](http://www.sharsheret.org)

**Family Focus (A Sharsheret Program)**

866.474.2774  
[www.sharsheret.org](http://www.sharsheret.org)

**Association of Jewish Family and  
Children's Agencies**

800.634.7346  
[www.ajfca.org](http://www.ajfca.org)

**Bikur Cholim National Directory**

212.632.4730  
[www.jewishboard.org/about-us/programsservices/jewish-community-services/bikurcholim-directory/](http://www.jewishboard.org/about-us/programsservices/jewish-community-services/bikurcholim-directory/)

**Cancer Support Community**

202.659.9709  
[www.cancersupportcommunity.org](http://www.cancersupportcommunity.org)

**Kids Cope**

[www.kidscope.org](http://www.kidscope.org)

**Kids Connected**

800.899.2866  
[www.kidsconnected.org](http://www.kidsconnected.org)

**Lotsa Helping Hands**

[www.lotsahelpinghands.org](http://www.lotsahelpinghands.org)

**Men Against Breast Cancer**

866.547.MABC  
[www.menagainstbreastcancer.org](http://www.menagainstbreastcancer.org)

**Mommy has Breast Cancer**

877.386.7322  
[www.mommyhasbreastcancer.org](http://www.mommyhasbreastcancer.org)

**Mothers Supporting Daughters  
with Breast Cancer**

410.778.1982  
[www.mothersdaughters.org/](http://www.mothersdaughters.org/)

**Telling Kids About Cancer**

[www.tellingkidsaboutcancer.com/](http://www.tellingkidsaboutcancer.com/)

**Wonders & Worries: A Family's Illness.  
A Child's Journey**

512.329.5757  
[www.wondersandworries.org](http://www.wondersandworries.org)

## Fertility, Pregnancy, and Nursing

### **A T.I.M.E (Torah Infertility Medium of Exchange)**

718.437.7110

[www.atime.org](http://www.atime.org)

### **Hope for Two- The Pregnant with Cancer Network**

800.743.4471

[www.pregnantwithcancer.org](http://www.pregnantwithcancer.org)

### **Myoncofertility.org**

866.708.3378

[www.myoncofertility.org](http://www.myoncofertility.org)

### **Path2Parenthood**

888.917.3777

[www.path2parenthood.org](http://www.path2parenthood.org)

### **Resolve**

703.556.7172

[www.resolve.org](http://www.resolve.org)

### **Save My Fertility**

[www.savemyfertility.org](http://www.savemyfertility.org)

## Financial Assistance

### **Angel Flight NE (travel)**

800.549.9980

978.794.6868

[www.angelflightne.org](http://www.angelflightne.org)

### **CancerCare**

800.813.HOPE

[www.cancercare.org](http://www.cancercare.org)

### **Financial Wellness Tool Kit (A Sharsheret Resource)**

866.474.2774

[www.sharsheret.org](http://www.sharsheret.org)

### **Corporate Angel Network (travel)**

866.328.1313

[www.corpangelnetwork.org](http://www.corpangelnetwork.org)

### **Rofeh Cholim Cancer Society**

718.722.2002

[www.rofehcholim.org](http://www.rofehcholim.org)

### **Zichron Shlome Refuah Fund**

718.438.9355

[www.zsrf.org](http://www.zsrf.org)

## Holistic, Complementary, and Integrative Medicine

### **American Academy of Medical Acupuncture**

[www.medicalacupuncture.org](http://www.medicalacupuncture.org)

### **American Association of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine**

[www.aaaomonline.org](http://www.aaaomonline.org)

### **American Holistic Medical Association**

[www.aihm.org](http://www.aihm.org)

### **Holistic Primary Care: News for Health and Healing**

[www.holisticprimarycare.net](http://www.holisticprimarycare.net)

### **National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health**

[www.nccih.nih.gov](http://www.nccih.nih.gov)

### **National Center for Homeopathy**

[www.homeopathycenter.org](http://www.homeopathycenter.org)

### **Office of Cancer Complementary and Alternative Medicine**

[www.cam.cancer.gov/](http://www.cam.cancer.gov/)

### **Oncology Nutrition**

[www.oncologynutrition.org](http://www.oncologynutrition.org)

## Insurance and Employment

### **Cancer and Careers: Living and Working with Cancer**

[www.cancerandcareers.org](http://www.cancerandcareers.org)

### **Disability Rights Legal Center**

212.736.1455

866.843.2572

[www.drlcenter.org](http://www.drlcenter.org)

### **HealthCare.gov**

[www.healthcare.gov](http://www.healthcare.gov)

### **Patient Advocate Foundation**

800.532.5274

[www.patientadvocate.org](http://www.patientadvocate.org)

## Physician Referral Services

### **ECHO Institute for Health**

845.425.9750

718.859.9800

### **Ezra LeMarpeh**

[www.ezra-lemarpe.org/en/](http://www.ezra-lemarpe.org/en/)

### **Medstar**

718.787.1800

[www.sbhonline.org](http://www.sbhonline.org)

### **Relief**

718.432.9501

[www.reliefhelp.org](http://www.reliefhelp.org)

## Clinical Trials

### **About Clinical Trials**

[www.learnaboutclinicaltrials.org](http://www.learnaboutclinicaltrials.org)

### **American Cancer Society**

[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

### **BreastCancerTrials.org**

[www.breastcancertrials.org](http://www.breastcancertrials.org)

### **Basser Center for BRCA**

[www.basser.org](http://www.basser.org)

### **CancerCare**

[www.cancercares.org](http://www.cancercares.org)

### **CenterWatch Clinical Trials**

#### **Listing Service**

[www.centerwatch.com](http://www.centerwatch.com)

### **Clinical Trials and Me**

[www.clinicaltrialsandme.com](http://www.clinicaltrialsandme.com)

### **Coalition of Cancer Cooperative Groups**

[www.cancertrialshelp.org](http://www.cancertrialshelp.org)

### **eCancerTrials**

[www.cancerconnect.com](http://www.cancerconnect.com)

### **Emerging Med**

877.601.8601

[www.app.emergingmed.com/emed/home](http://www.app.emergingmed.com/emed/home)

### **FORCE**

[www.facingourrisk.org](http://www.facingourrisk.org)

### **National Cancer Institute**

[www.cancer.gov/clinicaltrials](http://www.cancer.gov/clinicaltrials)

### **National Institute of Health**

[www.clinicaltrials.gov](http://www.clinicaltrials.gov)

### **Search Clinical trials**

[www.searchclinicaltrials.org](http://www.searchclinicaltrials.org)

### **Susan G. Komen Breast**

#### **Cancer Foundation**

[ww5.komen.org](http://ww5.komen.org)

## Managing Cosmetic Side Effects

### **The Bella Chachky Diamond and**

### **Sylvia Diamond Geller Best Face**

#### **Forward™ Program**

866.474.2774

[www.sharsheret.org](http://www.sharsheret.org)

### **Facing the Mirror with Cancer**

312.420.5610

[www.facingthemirror.org](http://www.facingthemirror.org)

### **Kimara Ahnert**

212.452.4252

[www.kimara.com](http://www.kimara.com)

### **Lashes for Life**

888.603.0866

[www.lashesforlife.com](http://www.lashesforlife.com)

### **Look Good Feel Better**

800.395.LOOK

800.ACS.2345

[www.lookgoodfeelbetter.org](http://www.lookgoodfeelbetter.org)

### **Shop Well with You**

800.799.6790

[www.shopwellwithyou.org](http://www.shopwellwithyou.org)

### **“TLC” Tender Loving Care, American**

#### **Cancer Society**

800.850.9445

[www.tlccatalog.org](http://www.tlccatalog.org)

### Spirituality

#### **Shira Ruskey Center**

212.632.4608

[www.jewishboard.org](http://www.jewishboard.org)

#### **Ritualwell**

215.576.0800

[www.ritualwell.org](http://www.ritualwell.org)

### Survivorship

#### **Thriving Again®**

#### **(A Sharsheret Program)**

866.474.2774

[www.sharsheret.org](http://www.sharsheret.org)

#### **LIVESTRONG Foundation**

855.220.7777

[www.livestrong.org](http://www.livestrong.org)

#### **National Coalition for Cancer**

#### **Survivorship**

877.622.7937

[www.canceradvocacy.org](http://www.canceradvocacy.org)

### Technology Based Resources

#### **Care Pages**

888.852.5521

[www.carepages.com](http://www.carepages.com)

#### **Caring Bridge**

651.789.2300

[www.caringbridge.org](http://www.caringbridge.org)

#### **MyLifeLine.org**

720.883.8715

[www.mylifeline.org](http://www.mylifeline.org)

#### **Navigating Cancer**

800.925.4456

[www.navigatingcancer.com](http://www.navigatingcancer.com)

#### **Think About Your Life**

816.695.4334

[www.thinkaboutyourlife.org](http://www.thinkaboutyourlife.org)

Please visit Sharsheret's website at [www.sharsheret.org](http://www.sharsheret.org) for a continuously updated online Resource Directory.

The information contained in this booklet is intended to provide broad knowledge of available resources and should not be construed as an endorsement of any health care professional, organization, or program mentioned in the Resource Directory. All medical information should be discussed with a health care professional.



## BOOKLETS AVAILABLE IN THIS SERIES

Your Jewish Genes:  
Hereditary Breast Cancer  
and Ovarian Cancer

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Facing Breast Cancer as  
a Jewish Woman

.....

Facing Cancer as a Frum Woman

.....

Facing Ovarian Cancer as  
a Jewish Woman

.....

Breast Cancer and the Ritual Bath:  
A Guide for Mikvah Attendants

.....

Thriving Again®: For Young  
Jewish Breast Cancer Survivors

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Our Voices: Inspiring Words from  
the Women of Sharsheret

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For information about this booklet and other Sharsheret publications,  
E-mail: [info@sharsheret.org](mailto:info@sharsheret.org)  
Call Toll-Free: 866.474.2774

