

Breast Cancer

"I love you, I love you"

Miranda Moss is a busy mom who, despite working 12-hour days as a restaurant owner, has always found time to stay healthy. One morning while getting dressed, she discovered a lump in her left breast.

"I just thought it was something different, like a cyst, maybe, but I felt that as a responsible mother I should have it seen."-Miranda, Patient

It turned out that Miranda had stage 2 breast cancer. Doctors assign breast cancer a stage by using the results of tests like imaging scans and biopsies. Breast cancer has five stages. Stage 0 cancers are called "carcinoma in situ"--which means, "in the original place." Some of these cancers will never spread, but they still need to be treated. Stage 1 breast cancer measures 3/4 of an inch or less. It may have spread to lymph nodes.

Stage 2 breast cancers, like Miranda's, can be up to 2 inches across. They may or may not have spread to lymph nodes. Stage 3 cancer has spread to lymph nodes. It may be more than 2 inches across, but it hasn't reached other organs. And stage 4 breast cancer has spread to other organs. At this stage it is considered incurable, but it's still treatable and long-term survival is possible.

"Take a deep breath...and out."

In addition to finding the stage, your health care provider may do tests to identify certain characteristics of the tumor.

"Some breast cancers need the hormones estrogen or progesterone to help them grow. Others contain a protein that makes them grow more quickly and aggressively."-Dr. Santosh Kesari, MD, Neuro-Oncologist

Such information, along with the stage of your cancer and your personal preference, is used to determine the best treatment for you. There are several different options. Miranda's treatment included a mastectomy, which is surgery to remove the breast.

"A mastectomy removes the whole breast, lymph nodes, and possibly some of the surrounding tissue around the breast. A double mastectomy removes both breasts. After a mastectomy you can choose to have reconstructive surgery to rebuild your breast."- Dr. Santosh Kesari, MD, Neuro-Oncologist

Doctors can treat smaller tumors with breast-conserving surgery called lumpectomy. This procedure removes only the part of the breast where the tumor is located, and some of the healthy tissue around it. Another treatment option is radiation, which uses high-energy x-rays to kill cancer cells.

"Having radiation before surgery can help shrink the tumor and make it easier to remove. You can also have

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radiation after surgery to kill the remaining cancer cells that are left behind.”- Dr. Santosh Kesari, MD, Neuro-Oncologist

Chemotherapy is another treatment your doctor might try before or after your surgery. It uses medicines to kill cancer cells all over your body. If your cancer has spread, it could be your main treatment. Hormone therapy uses drugs to lower the amount of hormones in your body that cancer cells need to grow. And targeted therapy blocks certain proteins, genes, and other substances that help breast cancer grow.

“And over time as we treat it everything shrank down and continues to shrink down even today.”

Today’s breast cancer treatments are very effective, but there’s still a chance the cancer can come back.

“Chapter 2”

That’s what happened to Miranda.

“A few months after my surgery, I started to notice a gradual decline in energy, I started feeling really fatigued, and eventually found a new lump in my stomach.”-Miranda, Patient

Miranda’s breast cancer had spread. After getting chemotherapy and radiation, she enrolled in a clinical trial, that is, a research study, of an experimental therapy.

“Research studies can give you access to a treatment that’s not yet available to the public, and it might be more effective than standard breast cancer drugs.”- Dr. Santosh Kesari, MD, Neuro-Oncologist

“Will you teach me how to draw cutie eyes Bowie, cuz I don’t know how to draw that.”

“Okay, Mummy.”

The treatment has dramatically shrunk Miranda’s cancer. She says the experience of living with breast cancer has given her a new outlook on life.

“This journey has really tested me mentally, physically, and emotionally. But I’ve also appreciated the opportunity to really show my daughter what it’s like to go through something challenging and continue to live the best life that you can possibly live.”-Miranda, Patient