

CSR- Chemo, Surgery, Reconstruction
by Tami Julka

When asked to write an article that might help and encourage other women who have been diagnosed with breast cancer, I thought about my journey and realized, for me, it was broken down into stages- chemo, surgery, and breast reconstruction. Each has its own challenges, and, believe it or not, rewards, as well. The very first thing I did, and highly recommend, is find a word or phrase that will inspire and motivate you. Mine was "No Fear" and that sentiment continues to define me to this day. Now, time to fight like a girl!

To the woman undergoing chemotherapy treatment- There will be days where your body is utterly depleted of every single ounce of energy and strength. It's okay, allow yourself the time and rest needed for rejuvenation. This is when you call upon your co-survivors (a spouse, family member, friends, coworkers or neighbors) and ask for help. They care about you and want to help, so let them. It doesn't make you weak or dependent. You can be Superwoman another day, and know for certain that you will. On the days you feel good, get outside and exercise. My happy place was going to a nearby lake for a walk and soaking up the sun and appreciating the little things in life. Journal, it will help to reflect on your thoughts and feelings.

To the woman about to undergo surgery- This is probably the most difficult time, especially if you've chosen to have a mastectomy. It will be physically and mentally painful and you will have to dig deep in your soul for willpower and determination. We've all read the poem "what cancer cannot do" and all of it is true, but ultimately, cancer does take from you. It will feel as though your womanhood is being ripped from you without permission. But this is also a time when your inner beauty is at its strongest. Your kindness, your compassion, your humor, your love for others...all the wonderful qualities that make you the woman that you are. Let these things shine through, for they are at their brightest.

To the woman who has chosen breast reconstruction- Do not be fooled that it's smooth sailing from here. Unfortunately, this process is the most time-consuming and uncomfortable periods you will experience. You will probably question your decision to why you would put yourself through this. Reminder! This is when you give cancer the middle finger and finally get something back from this path you were forced to take. Now, you can stand in front of a mirror and see not only a beautiful body, but a new you. Embrace your experience and acknowledge your achievement.

You are a fighter. You are a warrior. You are a survivor. You are an ambassador of life.

This piece was written and submitted by Tami Julka, a local survivor and Komen Ambassador. If you would like the opportunity to share your story, please reach out to us [here](#).