



# Living with cancer

When I was told I had breast cancer, I felt numb with shock. It was like being handed the death sentence. All I could think about was that my life was coming to an end soon. This seemed very unfair as I was only 42 years old.

The first thing I did was to tell my friends and family. Having to actually say the words "I have cancer" was helpful. After all, here I was, still alive, still the

**Khethiwe (not her real name) tells how she reacted when she found out she had breast cancer**

same person, telling the people closest to me I have cancer. Now it's more than a year later. I am still here, I feel fine, go to work and am carrying on with my life. Like thousands of others, I am living with cancer.

I found a lump in my breast in September 1991. I saw a doctor who sent me to the breast clinic at the Johannesburg General Hospital. They found I had

breast cancer. The doctors said I should have my breast removed (a mastectomy) to stop the cancer from spreading any further. Then they found the cancer had already spread to my bones. I got terrible pains in my back and couldn't walk.

**B**ecause the cancer had spread, the doctors said there was no longer any need to remove my breast. They said I should have chemotherapy (very strong drug treatment) instead. They put some very powerful chemicals into my body through my veins. These chemicals attack the cancer, but they also attack the healthy cells in the body. This causes side-effects like vomiting and losing hair. It made me very ill and weak. I had to stay in hospital for two months. I lost a lot of weight and all my hair fell out.

Lying in hospital made me question why I got cancer at an early age. My sister sent me some information about new ways of treating cancer being tried out in Britain. Other friends gave me articles about how cancer patients can help in the healing of their own bodies.

I realised I had made myself open to serious illness by the way I lived - by getting worried and depressed about life's difficulties, by working too hard and not getting enough sleep, by not eating properly and not looking after my health.

I decided if I was going to live with cancer, then I would have to change my way of life. I also



decided I was not going to be a quiet "victim", just waiting to die. I decided to care for my body and get involved in my own healing.

**T**he next thing was to get my friends involved. They were loving and supportive and gave me great encouragement. This was very good for me, as being sick is also lonely and frightening.

My hair has now grown back and I feel almost normal. I do get tired more easily, but I am trying to make myself strong by eating very healthy food and sleeping and relaxing more.

The books I had been reading say cancer patients should try to

eat organically grown vegetables (vegetables which are not grown with chemical fertilisers or treated with poisons to kill insects). It also means cutting out food which has preservatives, like tinned food. Cancer patients should try to cut out meat (especially red meat), salt, sugar or caffeine (tea or coffee). I take lots of Vitamin C and drink fresh carrot juice every day.

I also try to spend some time on my own every day just relaxing. I sleep much better now and feel quite healthy. I am calmer and try not to let life get me down. Every day I feel lucky to be alive. My life has changed - I think for the better. ●