

Lucy

This is a fictional patient whose story is based on the real-life experiences of women with secondary breast cancer.

Age: 32

Summary: At the age of 31, Lucy was diagnosed with primary and secondary breast cancer within the space of just a few weeks. In the year since her diagnosis, Lucy has struggled with her mental health but has found a range of psychological support extremely helpful. She is beginning to feel much more in control and seeks comfort in planning and looking ahead. Her disease is stable on fulvestrant (Faslodex) hormone injections and trastuzumab (Herceptin), though vaginal discomfort and dryness have been particular issues for her. Lucy is independent in seeking out information about treatments but has recently felt that she would like to discuss and share her experiences with women in similar situations.

Lucy's story

After seeing an advertising campaign for breast cancer awareness on social media, Lucy checked her breasts in the shower and found a small, hard lump. Her GP referred her to the breast clinic at her local hospital. She had lots of tests and, after a whirlwind few weeks, found out that she had secondary breast cancer in her lungs. Her doctors explained that her diagnosis was 'de novo metastatic' or 'de novo secondary' breast cancer, meaning that her breast cancer had already spread elsewhere in her body before it had been detected. This was a lot for Lucy to get her head around, since she had never heard of secondary breast cancer, let alone 'de novo', before.

Looking back, Lucy recalls that she had suffered with shortness of breath and an ongoing cough for a number of months but had put this down to over-doing it at the gym and anxiety related to a busy period at work.

In the months after her diagnosis, Lucy found it difficult to cope and her mental health was suffering. She struggled to come to terms with being diagnosed with an incurable cancer at such a young age and felt as though she was grieving for the loss of her future. Her family and friends also found it difficult to accept and to talk about and she felt very alone as a result. She reached out for psychological support through her GP, who pointed her in the direction of IAPT ('Improving access to psychological therapies'). Through this, she was able to access some online cognitive behavioural therapy and attend some classes for managing stress and anxiety. She also accessed some counselling through her local Breast Cancer Haven centre. As a result, Lucy has felt much more able to cope. She still has periods where her mental health is suffering, though she now has techniques to manage this and knows that there are people and places she can turn to for support.

Since starting her treatment, Lucy has struggled with vaginal dryness which has become very uncomfortable. This wasn't ever really mentioned in discussions with her oncologist or breast cancer nurse and she was embarrassed to raise this at her follow-up appointments. It has been increasingly painful for her to have sex with her new partner and she felt that this was affecting their relationship. She recently built up the confidence to mention this to her oncologist, who recommended some vaginal moisturisers and lubricants which have proved extremely helpful.

Lucy has worked very hard to progress in her career as an accountant and this is extremely important to her. She feels it is a huge part of who she is, though she is wondering how long she can keep up the

pace and what will happen in the future. The thought of having to stop work frightens her, not only in terms of finances but also because it feels like she would be giving up a part of herself.

Lucy has always been very organised and practical, in both her work and social life, and wants to do the same with her cancer. She feels much less anxious and more able to cope if she is prepared. This has recently led to her looking into advanced care planning and she has started writing her will. She also likes to look ahead to other treatment options and to discuss research or news stories which she has read about with her oncologist, who is very happy to involve her in her treatment decisions.

Lucy is now keen to meet more women her age who are going through the same thing. As a result, she has started looking at online forums and is considering attending one of Breast Cancer Now's 'Younger Women Together' support events.

If you are experiencing anything similar to Lucy, there is lots of information and guidance on the LIBERATE website which you may find useful. Please follow the links below.

- ❖ [Psychological well-being](#)
- ❖ [Younger women with secondary breast cancer](#)
- ❖ [Symptom monitoring & tailored self-management](#)
- ❖ [Relationships, sex & intimacy](#)
- ❖ [Looking ahead](#)
- ❖ [Signposting to services & support](#)