

## Trish

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

**Age:** 63

**Summary:** Trish was diagnosed with secondary breast cancer in her liver 12 years after finishing treatment for primary breast cancer. She is currently taking exemestane (Aromasin) and has been stable on this treatment for a number of years. Trish finds it helpful to think of her secondary breast cancer as a chronic disease which can be managed. She has found sharing experiences within support groups particularly helpful, though wishes she was assigned to a Clinical Nurse Specialist.

### *Trish's story*

Trish has been living with secondary breast cancer for five years. She was diagnosed when some routine blood tests showed that there was a problem with her liver. As it had been 12 years since her primary breast cancer diagnosis, Trish didn't for a moment consider that her breast cancer may have returned. Her GP organised some more blood tests and scans 'to be on the safe side', following which Trish was told that her breast cancer had returned in her liver.

Trish is currently taking exemestane (Aromasin) and has had relatively few side-effects when compared to her chemotherapy the first time around. She sometimes has hot flushes and night sweats, though feels able to cope with these as she experienced them when going through the menopause. A hand-held battery-operated fan has proved really helpful. She also has some aching pain in her knees, which is worse in the morning but tends to ease towards the afternoon. If it is particularly bad, she finds rubbing ibuprofen gel into both knees can help.

The diagnosis was very difficult for Trish (who had recently retired) and her family to come to terms with. However, five years down the line they are all feeling much more optimistic. Trish's oncologist has referred to her secondary breast cancer as being managed 'like a chronic disease' and they like to think of it this way. Her current treatment has been working well for a number of years and her most recent scan showed that her disease was stable. Trish prefers not to think about her prognosis too much. She is happy to keep planning ahead and enjoying holidays with her partner and family.

Trish has found sharing experiences with other women with secondary breast cancer to be the most valuable source of support. She met two friends at a local breast cancer support group and they now meet up regularly outside the group, supporting each other through treatment and scans but also just catching up and having a good time together. Trish prefers not to use the internet as she's never quite sure what to trust and it feels as though it can be 'opening a can of worms', with the potential to come across something frightening or negative. She has a good relationship with her oncologist and so prefers to ask her about symptoms and side-effects if her friends aren't sure. Sometimes she wishes she could ask her oncologist more questions but feels self-conscious taking up time in a busy clinic. Her friend Sarah, who is treated at a different hospital, has a Clinical Nurse Specialist who she can call or request an appointment with and Trish wishes this option was available for her. She would like to have more in-depth conversations about treatments, especially if there comes a time when the current treatment is no longer working.

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

- ❖ [Psychological well-being](#)
- ❖ [Support for others](#)
- ❖ [Symptom monitoring & tailored self-management advice](#)
- ❖ [Signposting to services & support](#)
- ❖ [How to read the evidence](#)
- ❖ [Treatment](#)