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## Health

# Treatment Tip: Discuss Your Breast Cancer Options With a Nurse Navigator

You'll want to weigh your breast cancer [treatment options](#) with a doctor or doctors whom you trust—but also consider talking to an oncology nurse. "Women should ask for an advanced oncology certified nurse (AOCN), who functions as a nurse navigator or nurse coordinator," recommends Robin M. Lally, PhD, a research assistant professor at the University at Buffalo School of Nursing and a former breast cancer clinical nurse specialist herself.



(AUSLOESER/ZEFA/CORBIS)

"They can help answer questions about [surgery](#), [chemotherapy](#), [radiation therapy](#)—the whole course of treatment—and help women understand what they are hearing from their surgeon and others, help with decision-making, and serve as an advocate and contact for them," explains Lally. "It's like having a friend in the system who knows how to manage everything."

### More about treatment

- [How to Choose Your Breast Cancer Treatment](#)
- [Finding Good Breast Cancer Doctors](#)

Since there's often a lag time between when a woman is diagnosed and when she sees her medical oncologist—surgery typically falls in between the two—nurses can bridge the gap by providing you with insider information about what to expect from your treatment and what it will mean for you, your family, and your work.

### Sometimes it's easier to talk to a nurse than a doctor

"Oftentimes women are worried about asking their physicians questions—they don't want to appear stupid or that they are less serious about treating their cancer if they're asking about their worries about missing work, for example, so the AOCN is a 'safe' person to ask."

Not all hospitals, breast centers, and cancer centers have a designated nurse navigator, nurse coordinator, or an AOCN. But many have OCNs (oncology-certified nurses) and even a straight-up oncology nurse can be a great resource. Or you can ask about a hospital social worker or other type of coordinator who helps patients find what they need. Every center works a little bit differently.

### A tip from an experienced oncology nurse

If you feel you already have the information you need but are on the fence about committing to a particular treatment plan, Lally has some advice to share that she has found helpful in caring for thousands of women.

"If a woman is really struggling, I'll ask her, how have you made other big decisions in your life—to get married, to buy a house or a car? They will often follow the same ways. A woman may say, 'I just sort of sleep on it and it comes to me,' or they say, 'I do a lot of research,' or 'I rely on my mother to help me.' And sometimes women

don't realize that it would be acceptable to rely on those same ways of making decisions."

*For more about oncology nurses, visit the [Oncology Nursing Society's site](#).*

Lead writer: Lorie Parch  
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