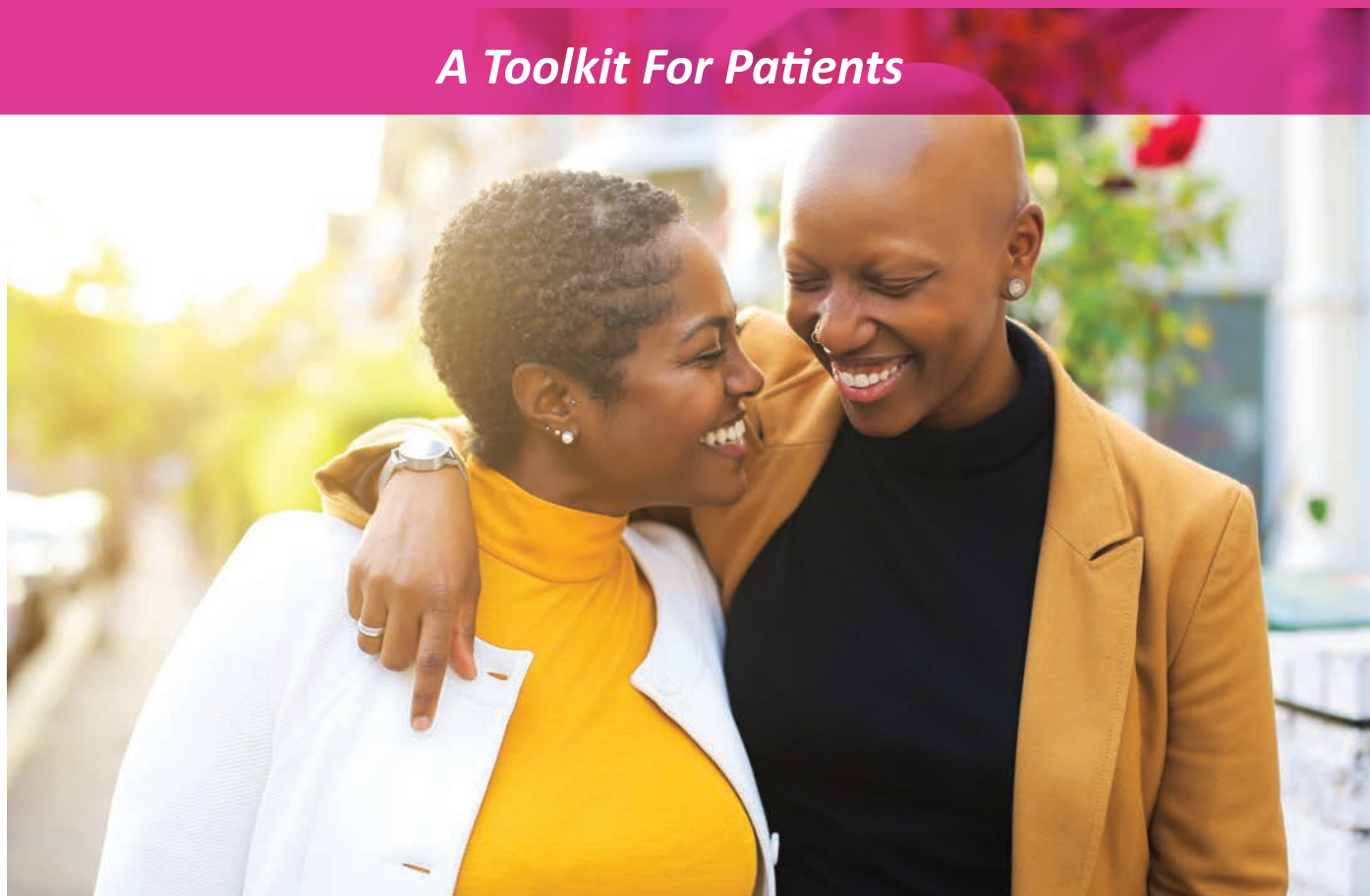


NAVIGATING MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS DURING TIMES OF STRESS

A Toolkit For Patients



CREATED WITH YOU IN MIND

Taking care of yourself is essential and to get through treatment, it becomes especially important. Self-care comes in the form of a healthy diet, exercise, and body products as explained in our Lifestyle toolkit. As woman of color, while we care for our bodies, and others, often times we neglect our mental health. As humans we all have physical, psychological and social needs. And improving the psychological status of women not only improves survival, but also the mental health of our families.¹ The physical pursuit of wellness combined with a positive mindset will allow you to press forward in a more conscious way. Taking care of yourself first, and prioritizing all aspects of your health will benefit you and the effects are amplified through friends and family. A great mental mindset will be beneficial and necessary as you undergo treatment for breast cancer.



Tigerlily
Foundation
Beauty. Strength. Transformation.



WHY MENTAL HEALTH IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF YOUR JOURNEY

As you go through breast cancer and treatment you may experience a negative affect on your mental health. You may experience anxiety, anger, depression, and changes in body esteem.¹ Combating these adverse affects of cancer and treatment with therapy and positive thinking can go a long way. According to the Mayo Clinic, positive thinking can:

- Lower rates of depression
- Lower levels of distress
- Increased resistance to sickness
- Better psychological and physical well-being
- Better cardiovascular health
- Better coping skills during hardships and times of stress

In short, your mental wellness impacts your physical well-being. Stress affects your immune system and your immune system affects cancer control.² Research shows that women with breast cancer who avail of mental health support have a decreased risk of recurrence and early death, even years after therapy.³

Getting ahead of these possible side effects and preparing your mind mentally can help to keep you safe. To prevent these experiences as much as possible, it's a good idea to practice self-care. Self-care includes doing activities that spark joy in your life. It can be reading a book, spending time with family and friends, spending time with your pet, or going on a walk. The idea is to find joy where you can.

PATIENT CONSIDERATIONS

Trauma

Receiving a cancer diagnosis is traumatic within itself. The American Psychological Association (APA) states that receiving a diagnosis of breast cancer can be one of the most distressing events women face. Distress typically continues even after the initial shock of diagnosis has passed. As women begin treatment, you may find your personal relationships in turmoil or you may feel tired all the time. And the worrying about symptoms, treatment, and your life can amplify the anxiety.⁴ And as a Black woman, there is no shortage of things to worry about.

While anxiety and concern is normal after a breast cancer diagnosis, it's your response to the trauma that you should pay attention to. If you hit a point of distress, we recommend that you call in reinforcements like a therapist.



Therapy

A highly recommended option for your self-care practice is to get a therapist to help you navigate life. Protecting your psychological well-being can improve your physical well-being. Therapy is often stigmatized in the Black community, but can produce amazing outcomes. Therapy can prevent and/or combat depression and distress.

Getting a therapist that you have a good connection with and you can relate to is important. This allows you to feel more comfortable to share freely with your therapist. In order to find a therapist Psychology today recommends¹:

1. Asking friends first
2. Research online
3. Decide on gender
4. Search for Black therapists
5. Call them

When determining if this therapist is a good fit for Psychology today says to consider:

1. Notice how you feel during the first phone call
2. Pay attention to how you feel during the first session
3. Notice if you feel heard and seen

If it's not a good match, it's okay to look for another therapist.

Topics you may want to consider discussing:

- How you feel
- Your relationships
- Stress
- Intimacy
- Body Image
- Life After Cancer





Life coaching

Life coaching can be a great tool in conjunction with therapy and other therapies to help you navigate your breast cancer diagnosis and treatment. While a therapist works with you to evaluate how your past can impact your present and future, a life-coach works with you to move forward and work towards the future that you want.

At Tigerlily, we offer free life coaching sessions with Bruce Van Horn for breast cancer patients. Book time with Bruce [HERE](#).

A Positive Mindset

A positive mindset affects the way you look at life and experience treatment. A positive outlook can be a form of treatment. While it may not completely eliminate anxiety, it does contribute to survival. Being at peace has been proven to lower your heart rate and allow your mind to be in a good place.



Support System

Having a support system can help you through your treatment and after. After all, as humans, we are social beings. Having friends and family comfort you is beneficial as it takes a village. It's also great to connect with others going through a similar experience. There are many support groups out there to support you through this experience.

Support can come in many forms, it can be through groups or even spirituality. The goal is to find what is right for you and what brings you joy.

Additionally, our partners [Imerman's Angels](#) has a matching system that can peer you with individuals going through the same experience as well.



Integrative Care

Complementary and integrative practices like acupuncture as can help to reduce side effects due to treatment. It is worth exploring and potentially incorporating into your wellness activities. Research and explore therapies like:



Yoga



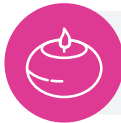
Acupuncture



Singing Bowls



Journaling



Aroma Therapy



Massage therapy



Chiropractic care

Exercise & Sleep

There is a direct link between physical and psychological health, particularly in relation to breast cancer. Distress often tends to have impact beyond initial shock of diagnosis.

Most common psychological concerns reported by women with breast cancer include:

- Fear of reoccurrence,
- Physical symptoms such as fatigue, trouble sleeping, or pain
- Body image disruption
- Sexual dysfunction
- Treatment-related anxieties
- Intrusive thoughts about illness/persistent anxiety
- Marital/partner communication
- Feelings of vulnerability
- Existential concerns regarding mortality

Exercise and sleep are great ways to stay healthy and combat the psychological concerns that occur due to diagnosis.





QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR HEALTH CARE TEAM

- Do you recommend therapy?
- What is the cost commitment?
- Does insurance cover my therapy sessions?
- Does insurance cover any forms of exercise or alternative therapies?
- Do you recommend any Black therapists?
- Do you have any recommendations for support groups?
- Will my treatment impact my sleep?
- Will my treatment impact my ability to exercise?
- Will my treatment impact my appetite?
- How can I combat any unwanted changes to my sexual health?
- Do you have any resources around mental health?
- What are your mental health recommendations for me?
- How have you seen treatment affect mental health in patients?
- Do you have an integrative team on site? (yoga therapist, breath work and meditation)

Questions for your insurance provider

- Are integrative care covered by insurance?
- What are my costs associated with alternate therapies?
- Is there a limit on the number of sessions that I can attend?

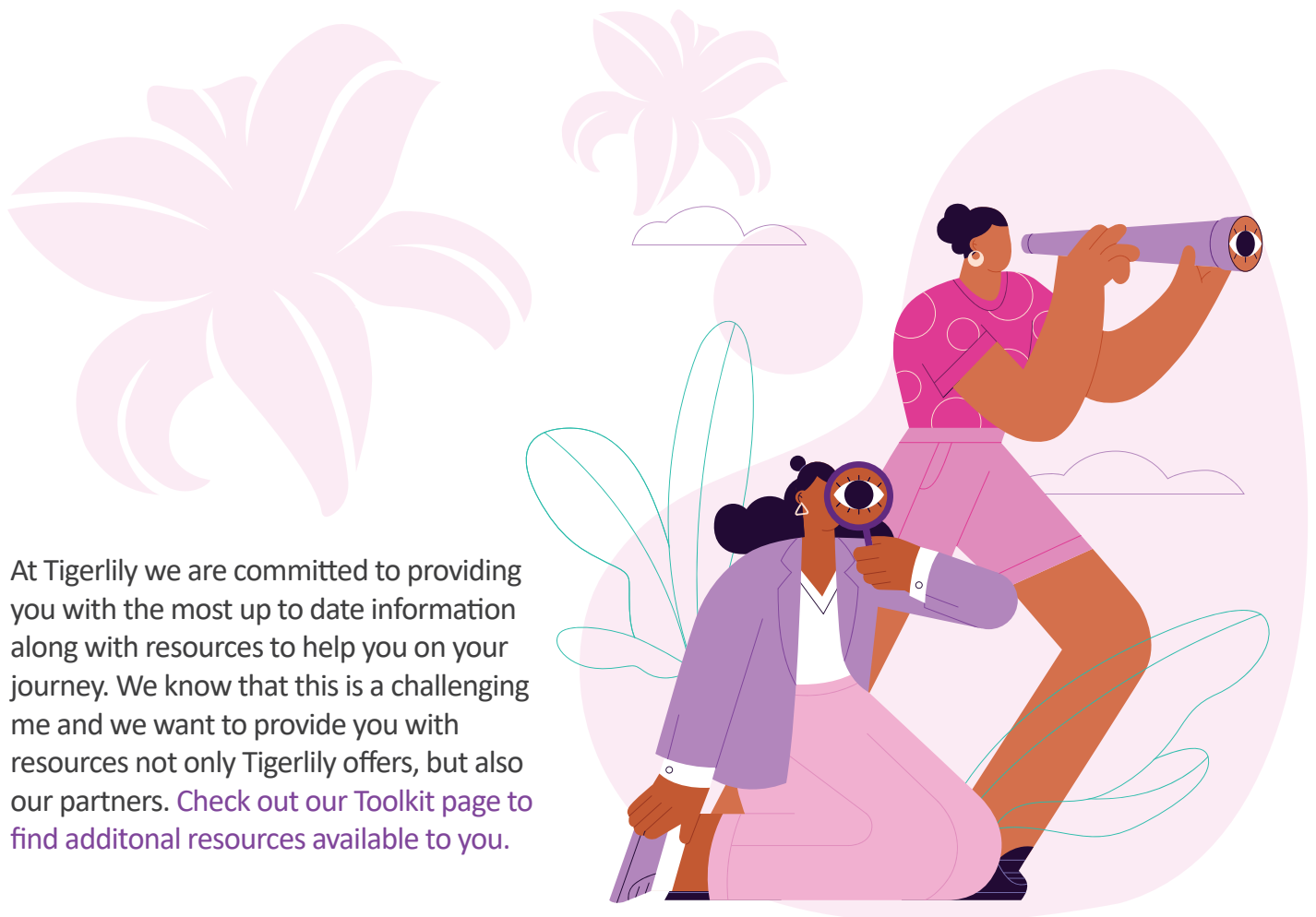


TIGER TIPS

The energy around you. Be mindful of the company that you keep. You will want to remain positive during treatment. This may require you to evaluate the company that you keep to ensure that you have the support that you truly need and are exerting time, energy and effort into fruitful relationships that will help you get through treatment.

A referral is a great start but not the end. Just because you get a referral does not mean this is your doctor. Do your due diligence and see how you feel with the doctor, therapist, or specialist. Is the visit stress inducing due to who is there or your treatment while there? If so, it may be worth pursuing other specialists.

We are a team. Look at each visit and relationship that you have with a professional as teamwork. They are not an expert as you are the only expert on you.



At Tigerlily we are committed to providing you with the most up to date information along with resources to help you on your journey. We know that this is a challenging one and we want to provide you with resources not only Tigerlily offers, but also our partners. [Check out our Toolkit page to find additional resources available to you.](#)