

[TRACK 5: SURVIVOR STORIES: INFORMATION FROM OTHER PEOPLE]

Gloria, 47 years old

[Gloria]

I started to look for information when I was about to begin my treatment with chemotherapy and radiation. The incision from my breast cancer surgery was just about healed. My doctor had told me there would be side effects from the treatments and I wanted to make this as easy on myself as possible. My doctor told me I might lose my hair and maybe I would feel like I have the flu. She also told me that there are some medications that can help with these symptoms, but the medicines can be expensive. I wanted to find out more about what I can do about the side effects. I had some questions about whether there was some kind of financial help I could get if I couldn't work. I also worried and wanted to know about what costs my insurance plan would or would not cover.

[Gloria]

Another thing—it is important to me that I am not a problem for my kids or my friends. In a book I found at the bookstore, I read that many people think that asking for help is a sign of weakness. I have to admit, I sort of thought this way, too. But, the woman who wrote this book said that asking for help can be a sign of courage and control. She said asking for help gives other people a chance to feel useful, especially if they care about you but don't know what to do to help you. She said asking for help can make everyone feel better. It has made it easier for me to ask for help when I think about it this way.

[Gloria]

When I first started with all of this, I didn't feel I could make these calls and ask questions over the telephone. I asked my daughter Rae to make some calls for me. She was happy to do this and said she was relieved I asked her because she wanted to do anything she could to help. While Rae was making those calls, I remembered that I had the telephone number for the social worker who had visited me in the hospital just after my surgery. I thought it would be easier for me to talk to someone in person. I called the social worker and set up an appointment.

[Gloria]

The social worker explained that there are many ways to help with the side effects of treatment. She taught me some simple breathing exercises to help me relax and suggested that I could listen to the audio program of these exercises during my treatments. She also explained how I could find out about financial help if I needed it. The hospital billing office, the insurance case manager, the personnel office at my job, and the social security office are all places I could go for more information.

[Gloria]

I have learned that it is important to get the right kind of information from the right places. I have also learned it is OK to ask for help. It is also OK to say, 'I'm not ready,' or, 'I'm not interested right now,' when people give me more information than I can handle.