



Breast cancer treatments have advanced to improve life expectancy and quality of life. Sometimes, these life-saving remedies can cause heart problems during and after treatment. Heart problems are usually minor, and can usually be managed with screening and treatment, but at times can be more severe. “Cardio-Oncology” is a new medical specialization that seeks to protect the heart during and after cancer treatment.

What do I need to know about treatments that can affect the heart?

It is important to remember that the therapies below are excellent at treating cancer. While they may potentially affect the heart, the overall risks are usually low.

- **Radiation** may affect the blood vessels, heart muscle, and/or heart valves in the area receiving radiation.
- **HER2 antagonists** (including Herceptin /trastuzumab) and **anthracyclines** (including doxorubicin, epirubicin, and daunorubicin) can affect the strength of the heart muscle.
- **Hormonal agents** (including tamoxifen or aromatase inhibitors) can affect the risk of developing clots and increase blood pressure or cholesterol.
- **Immunotherapy** works by turning your immune system against cancer. Rarely the immune system can also be activated against the heart.

There are recommended cardiology screening tests and preventive medications that can help patients at risk to help prevent heart issues.

What symptoms should I watch out for during my treatment?



Increased **shortness of breath** at rest or with activity



Increased **swelling of your legs or your belly**



Irregular heartbeat or racing of your heart



Shortness of breath when lying down or trying to sleep



Chest pressure/pain with activity

These symptoms can have different causes, but you should get a further evaluation to ensure your heart is still functioning well. If you have any questions, please let your providers know right away.

What do I need to do if I already have heart issues?

Please let your providers know before starting treatment. Your treatment team can ensure you are on the appropriate medications to reduce further risk of cardiology problems in the future.

How do surveillance testing and monitoring work?

Depending on your cancer treatment, your providers will recommend certain regular testing to detect heart issues early in the process (such as an EKG or heart ultrasound). Often, protective medications can be started that will help the heart if any concerns are detected with testing.

How can I help myself?

- ✓ **Eat healthy**, such as DASH, Mediterranean, plant-based, or other healthy eating plans. These plans include **more fruits and vegetables** and **reduce red meat and saturated fats**.
- ✓ **Regular physical activity and exercise** are always good for you and your heart. **Be aware of your limitations** when receiving cancer treatment because you may have to modify the extent of your exercise based on your energy level.
- ✓ **Take prescribed medications** and follow the **recommended screening**.

If I have symptoms, how will this affect my cancer treatment?

Cardio-Oncology providers aim for prevention and seek to address any heart concerns quickly and as early as possible to continue your cancer treatment. Most of the time, your team can address any heart concerns while maintaining the beneficial effects of your cancer therapy. The earlier you alert your providers, the better.

Where can I learn more?

Ask your healthcare providers!

Review our resources:
<https://ic-os.org/patient>

Check this out!
<https://ic-os.education/healthyheart>

