



Be Your Own Best Medical Advocate Guidebook

We encourage you to practice self-love by being your own best medical advocate. When something major happens to your health, it's easy to get swept away in anxiety, and to feel like a victim to the disease and healthcare system. The Breast and GYN Health Project tries to help people by providing tools and suggestions to become your own best medical advocate. By being involved in your own health advocacy, you not only gain a greater sense of control, but also can decrease stress, have increased confidence over your decisions, greater health literacy, better ability to get medical treatment and even better health outcomes.



SUGGESTIONS FOR BEING YOUR OWN BEST MEDICAL ADVOCATE

- Trust what you know. No one knows more about your body than you do.
- Keep a journal of what you are doing and feeling, what's happening. It is helpful to use as a reference as well as see how things may have changed over time.
- Maintain your own records – Create a binder or keep your records organized on your computer/phone. Get copies of your test results and notes from medical visits. If you have imaging done, ask for copies on CDs, not just the report. Bring these records with you to your medical appointments.
- Be informed about your illness and be involved in your own care. Be careful about what you read on the internet, it might not be relevant to your situation and other people's stories might scare you unnecessarily.
- Be prepared for your medical visits. Health care providers have limited time. The more clues you can give to the healthcare provider, the better they can work with you to address your issues. Bring your information – medication lists, family history, have a prioritized list of questions and/or issues, any information about your condition (i.e. track how often something is happening and the intensity of the issue so you can provide specific data).
- Don't be afraid to ask questions - Make a list of questions to ask your healthcare provider and prioritize the list so your most pressing questions are at the top of the list.
- Take notes or ask if you can record the medical visit or bring someone to take notes for you. Ask for spellings of medications, diagnosis and any terms that are unfamiliar. Ask where you can get more information on your diagnosis.
- Give feedback. Your relationship with your healthcare provider should be open, honest, and trusting. You and your provider are partners. If something is particularly helpful, say so. Or if you still have questions, it's OK to ask for clarification.
- Don't Give Up. Frustrated with the health care system? Try the three P's: Be Patient, Pleasant and Persistent.
- You don't need to do this alone. Try not to isolate yourself: Find a friend who is supportive of you and wants to help who can provide emotional support. Consider joining a support group of people with similar health conditions (in person or online).
- Get a second opinion if you're not sure about the direction of your health or healthcare.
- Get familiar with your health insurance. Take some time to learn about your plan. You may want to review your medical bills for errors.
- Self care – sleep, exercise, balance your nutrition, spend time with friends and loved ones, prayer and spirituality, practice gratitude, whatever healthy methods you use to relieve stress and promote self-healing, we encourage you to do it!

Exercises

SCOPE: Framework for Making Decisions

When working through complicated or hard decisions you can use this framework by yourself or with a support person to organize your thoughts and choices. After completing this exercise, you should have either come to a decision or have a list of questions you need to explore.

1. **Situation:** what are the details of your condition
2. **Choices:** what are your options, as you understand them
3. **Objective:** what are your personal goals and preferences
4. **People:** who will help or influence your decisions
5. **Evaluation:** where do you stand? Next steps, questions

Evaluating Choices

Once you have completed the SCOPE exercise, you can use this chart below to evaluate your choices. Write your choices down the first column and your goals/objectives across the top row to see where they align and the possible outcomes of your decision.

	Objective #1	Objective #2	Objective #3
Choice #1			
Choice #2			
Choice #3			

For a more in-depth walkthrough on how to be your own best medical advocate and the exercises in this Guidebook, make sure to watch

BGHP's Medical Consultant, Dr. Mary Meengs' webinar at

www.bghp.org/facing-cancer/becoming-your-own-best-medical-advocate