



Caring for your mental wellbeing

Receiving a diagnosis of advanced breast cancer can affect the mental health and wellbeing of people and their loved ones.

A lot of treatment and care for advanced breast cancer can focus on physical health, especially on symptoms and side effects but the importance of mental health and wellbeing is increasingly being recognised and acknowledged.

When we hear the words mental health we often think about mental illness. However, mental health is about our emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. It includes how we think, feel and act and helps determine how we handle challenges, relate to others and make choices¹.

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It is central to how we function in our day to day lives and how we interact with the world. Someone's mental health and wellbeing can be affected without having a diagnosis of a mental illness².

Many people describe receiving a diagnosis of advanced breast cancer as a shock even if they were expecting it. Having the outcome that you feared come true can be a devastating experience. Whether the diagnosis is the first cancer experience or after a previous early cancer diagnosis, hearing the words "advanced cancer" can shatter your sense of wellbeing. People describe a wide range of responses, thoughts and feelings after a diagnosis and during treatment for advanced breast cancer. Common reactions include fear, sadness, anger, guilt, worry, and feeling overwhelmed^{3,4}. People may ask 'why me?', 'what does this mean?' and be preoccupied with thoughts about how long they have left to live. People also describe feeling as if they are on a roller coaster, sometimes feeling ok and sometimes feeling sad or anxious. What we know is that this is normal and expected^{3,4,5,6}.

Alongside these thoughts and feelings many people report that their diagnosis impacts many other aspects of their wellbeing including their sense of self, their relationships with others, work, their faith and beliefs, and their certainty in life^{3,5}.

People can also experience some benefits to their mental health and wellbeing after a diagnosis. For example, some people will describe feeling relief once their diagnosis is confirmed. Not knowing what is wrong can be a challenging experience so having a diagnosis can bring a sense of relief⁴.

The same can be true about treatment. Treatment can provide a focus, the knowledge and reassurance that something is being done, and hope and optimism^{4,5,6}. Lots of people also describe being able to find a way of living with their diagnosis and finding a new sense of clarity with what and who is important in life. This can help to reprioritise people, goals and needs^{4,5,6}.

It's important to understand that because each person brings unique experiences and perspectives with them, not everyone's response to a diagnosis and treatment for advanced breast cancer is the same.

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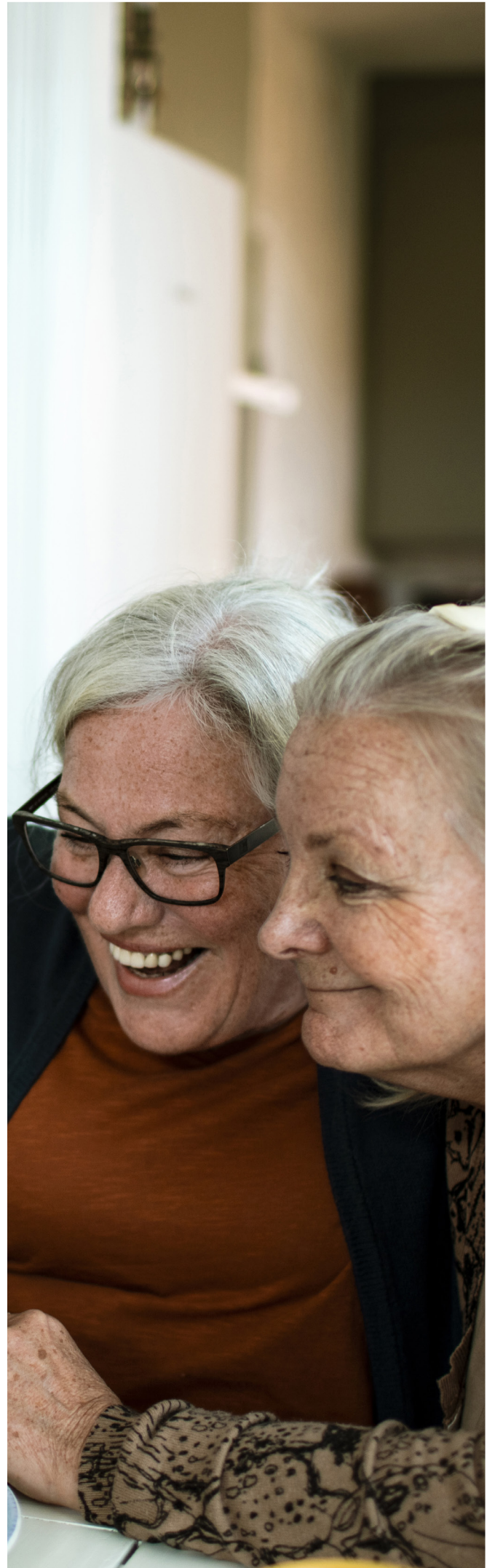
There is no right or wrong way to feel. How you feel does not say anything about you as a person or your character^{3,4,5,6}.

Many people will be worried about the impact of their diagnosis and treatment on their loved ones and may feel at times that they are a burden and are letting other people down. They may feel a responsibility to put on a 'brave face', hold it together and be positive even when they don't feel brave or strong or courageous. Being open with people you trust about how you feel can help to relieve some of this pressure^{5,6}.

Whilst it is normal and expected for your diagnosis and treatment to have an impact on your mental health and wellbeing, there are a few simple things that you can do to help.

There are five important building blocks of mental health and wellbeing that can be useful to keep in mind and focus on when you can^{3,4,5,6,7}.

- ✔ **Balanced nutrition.** This helps fuel the body and mind to be able to respond to stress and distress. Eat what you can when you can.
- ✔ **Sleep and rest.** This also helps the body and mind respond to stress and distress.
- ✔ **Movement and activity.** Keeping your body moving is good for your mind whether it's a 5-minute slow walk, or a 30-minute gym class.
- ✔ **Connect.** Spend time with people who are important to you.
- ✔ **Schedule.** Plan activities that are meaningful for you. This can provide some distraction, structure to your day and enjoyment.



It's important to note that some of these building blocks are hard to do at times after a diagnosis and during treatment. However, they can give you a sense of control and focus.

There are many other helpful strategies that people can use to help with their mental health and wellbeing. Each person has a preference for what they find useful. It is also important to keep in mind that the things that have always been helpful for you during challenging times will still be helpful. For example, if spending time with loved ones has always helped in difficult times, it will continue to help. If writing lists has always helped it will continue to help^{4,5,6}.

Reaching out for help for your mental health and wellbeing can be an incredibly difficult thing to do. But, if thoughts and feelings get in the way of getting through each day, that's a sign to seek help. Help can be from loved ones, your church or community groups, from your medical team, or from counselling and support services^{3,4,5,6}.

Lifeline Aotearoa's helpline and textline provides 24/7, confidential support from qualified counsellors and trained volunteers on (0800 543 354) or text 'HELP' to 4357.

Resources to help you on your journey.

- ✓ Breast Cancer Foundation website – offers information, support, counselling, rehab www.breastcancerfoundation.org.nz
- ✓ Cancer Society – offers information, support, counselling www.cancernz.org.nz
- ✓ Mental Health Foundation – information and support www.mentalhealth.org.nz
- ✓ Need to talk, free call/text/email 1737.org.nz
- ✓ Lifeline. Free confidential counselling support www.lifeline.org.nz



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IBRANCE® (palbociclib 75 mg, 100 mg and 125 mg) Capsules and Tablets.

IBRANCE (palbociclib) is a funded prescription medicine used to treat HR+, HER2- advanced breast cancer taken in combination with an aromatase inhibitor or fulvestrant. IBRANCE has risks and benefits. Do not take IBRANCE if you are allergic to palbociclib or any of the other ingredients in IBRANCE capsules or IBRANCE tablets. Caution is needed if you are premenopausal or perimenopausal, have or have had abnormal blood test results, respiratory infections or problems with your lungs, problems with your liver or kidneys, are lactose intolerant, are pregnant or planning to become pregnant or are breastfeeding. Tell your doctor if you are taking any other medicines. Common side effects include infection, abnormal blood test results, tiredness, feeling sick or vomiting, diarrhoea, sore mouth, lips or tongue, hair loss, loss of appetite, nose bleed, skin rash, change in sense of taste, blurred vision, increased tearing or dry eyes, shortness of breath, bleeding or bruising more easily than usual. If symptoms continue or you have side effects, see your doctor, pharmacist or healthcare professional. Ask your doctor if IBRANCE is right for you. Use strictly as directed. Contains 75 mg, 100 mg or 125 mg of palbociclib. IBRANCE is funded. A pharmacy charge and normal doctor's fees apply for all prescriptions. Further information on IBRANCE is available from Medsafe www.medsafe.govt.nz or Pfizer New Zealand Limited, Auckland, www.pfizer.co.nz Ph. 0800 736 363. V10721