

The 10 Commandments of Breast Cancer

1. *Thou shalt give thyself time to think.* When you're diagnosed, you may feel like you have to do something *right now*. You don't. Take a deep breath. Give the spinning in your head time to slow down before you make any decisions.

2. *Thou shalt not judge thy neighbor's treatment or reconstruction choices or attitude toward their diagnosis.* I honestly have not seen people in the breast cancer community judge each other's treatment or reconstruction choices, either online or offline. The real armchair quarterbacks are the people who have never been through it. They need to be mindful of who's actually on the playing field. Attitude gets a little trickier. No one has the right to tell you how you should feel. Some people would have you think you should be able to overcome your fluffy pink cancer by being all shiny and happy, or that you should be grateful for some life lesson. That's a BIG fail. But you may be the naturally optimistic type. You may actually *be* grateful. And we all need to remember that's okay too. We're all wired differently. I always say that telling you how you should feel about your diagnosis is kind of like saying you should be six feet tall or have brown eyes.

3. *Thou shalt honor thy own feelings,* whether shiny and happy or tired or angry or scared. And don't be surprised to feel all these things within the space of 15 minutes, several times a day.

4. *Thou shalt love thyself as thy neighbor.* Women are so darn hard on ourselves. Give yourself the same break you would to a loved one going through a big diagnosis.

5. *Thou shalt not beat thyself up.* You don't have breast cancer because you ate the wrong things or didn't breast-feed your kids or exercise enough or the right way. You have breast cancer, because.

6. *Thou shalt allow others to help you.* This is a tough one for many of us. But your family and friends want to be able to do something for you; let them.

7. *Thou shalt not bear false witness against science.* You may or may not decide on a certain course of treatment. (See Commandment 2.) You may or may not have a good experience. We can learn so much from each other's honest recounting of our experiences, but that doesn't make us medical experts. Celebrities and politicians have a special responsibility here.

8. *Thou shalt ask thy doctors questions.* Do not be afraid to ask, "What is the risk if I do A or B?" or "What does that word mean?" or "Could you repeat that?" Good doctors welcome your questions and concerns. Not-so-good ones need to be reminded there's a person attached to the breast.

9. *Thou shalt seize the day.* There's no doubt cancer is the elephant in the room. But sometimes you just have to pat its big ugly flank and say, "Excuse me, elephant, but I'm going to the beach, or the movies, or the back yard with my kids. I'll catch you when I get back. Right now, I'm off to have some fun."

10. *Thou shalt remember you are more than your cancer.* Cancer is all about cells run amok in your body. It will do its best to claim your identity as well. You may be a woman with cancer, but you are also a wife, mom, sister, daughter, employed person and friend. Let the extent to which cancer becomes part of your identity be your choice, not its choice.

-Jackie Fox

Author, *From Zero to Mastectomy: What I Learned And You Need to Know About Stage 0 Breast Cancer*