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BREAST CANCER: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

By Dr. Vivien Brown, Vice-president, Medical affairs, Medisys Executive Health

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among Canadian women and the second leading cause of death from cancer among the same demographic. By the numbers, it is estimated that about 1 in 8 women will develop breast cancer during their lifetime and 1 in 33 will die from it.¹ It's a very difficult reality, but ignorance is not bliss. On the contrary, having some basic knowledge about breast cancer is a powerful tool that can lead to early detection and a less traumatic diagnosis in the event that breast cancer becomes a part of your life.

Keep reading for a pertinent overview on breast cancer symptoms, types and treatments.

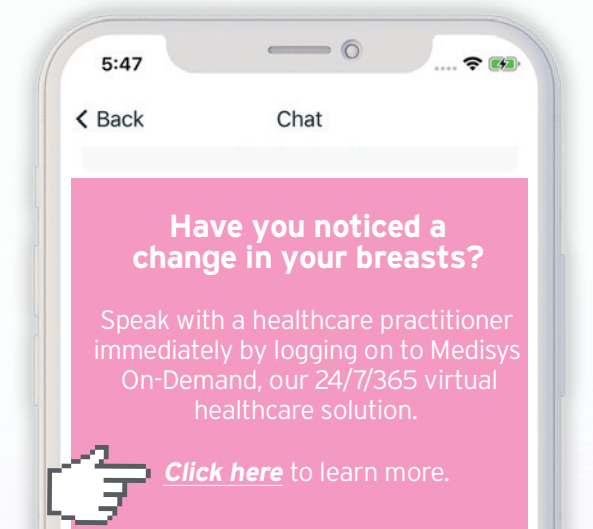
BREAST CANCER SYMPTOMS & DETECTION

Symptoms of breast cancer are extremely varied. And while an unusual change in the breast may be a symptom of cancer, it could also indicate a non-cancerous issue like a cyst or infection.

It's important to note that not all breast cancers produce a distinct lump or a mass; inflammatory breast cancer, for example, is a fast-growing form that usually starts with the reddening and swelling of the breast – with no lump.²

It is always helpful to be aware of changes in your breasts. Consult your doctor if you notice anything unusual, such as:

- swelling of all or part of the breast
- irritation, dimpling, thickening, redness or scaliness of the skin
- pain in any area of the breast
- the nipple turning inward
- nipple discharge other than breast milk
- a lump or mass of any kind in the breast or underarm area



TYPES OF BREAST CANCER

Breast cancer most often develops in the breast lobules that produce milk, in the ducts that transport milk to the nipple, or in the tissue in between them.³ Doctors classify breast cancer according to three main factors: the location of the cancer (for example, ductal or lobular), if and where it has spread (for example, in situ, invasive or metastatic) and if it has recurred after previous treatment.

We often hear about non-invasive versus invasive cancers, but when it comes to breast cancer, what does this mean?

Non-invasive breast cancers remain in the milk ducts or lobules in the breast, and do not invade the normal tissues within or outside of it. Invasive cancers on the other hand do grow into normal, healthy tissues, and most breast cancers are unfortunately invasive.

In some cases, however, invasive and non-invasive cancer cells can be present at the same time. Whether the cancer is non-invasive or invasive plays the biggest role in one's treatment options and how one may respond to them.

For more details on specific types of breast cancer, there are excellent resources [here](#) and [here](#).

2020 marks the 20th anniversary of World Cancer Day, celebrate annually on February 4. It is defined as a positive movement for everyone, everywhere to unite under one voice, building an alliance against "fear, ignorance and complacency."

[Click here to learn more.](#)

BREAST CANCER TREATMENTS

Breast cancer is treated differently depending on factors including the location and type of the cancer, and many patients will receive a combination of treatments provided by doctors with different specialties. Some common breast cancer treatments today include:⁴

- Surgery, which involves removing cancerous tissue during an operation.
- Chemotherapy, which shrinks or destroys cancerous cells using medication administered orally, intravenously or both.
- Radiation therapy, which uses high-energy rays to destroy cancerous cells.
- Hormonal therapy, which prevents cancerous cells from receiving the hormones required to grow.
- Biological therapy, which works with the body's immune system to help it fight cancer cells, or to manage the side effects produced by other treatments.

Even thinking about breast cancer can be upsetting and overwhelming, but learning about early detection strategies can significantly improve prognosis in the case of a diagnosis.⁵ Do you have questions about breast cancer screening? [Click here](#) to book a consult with your Medisys physician today.

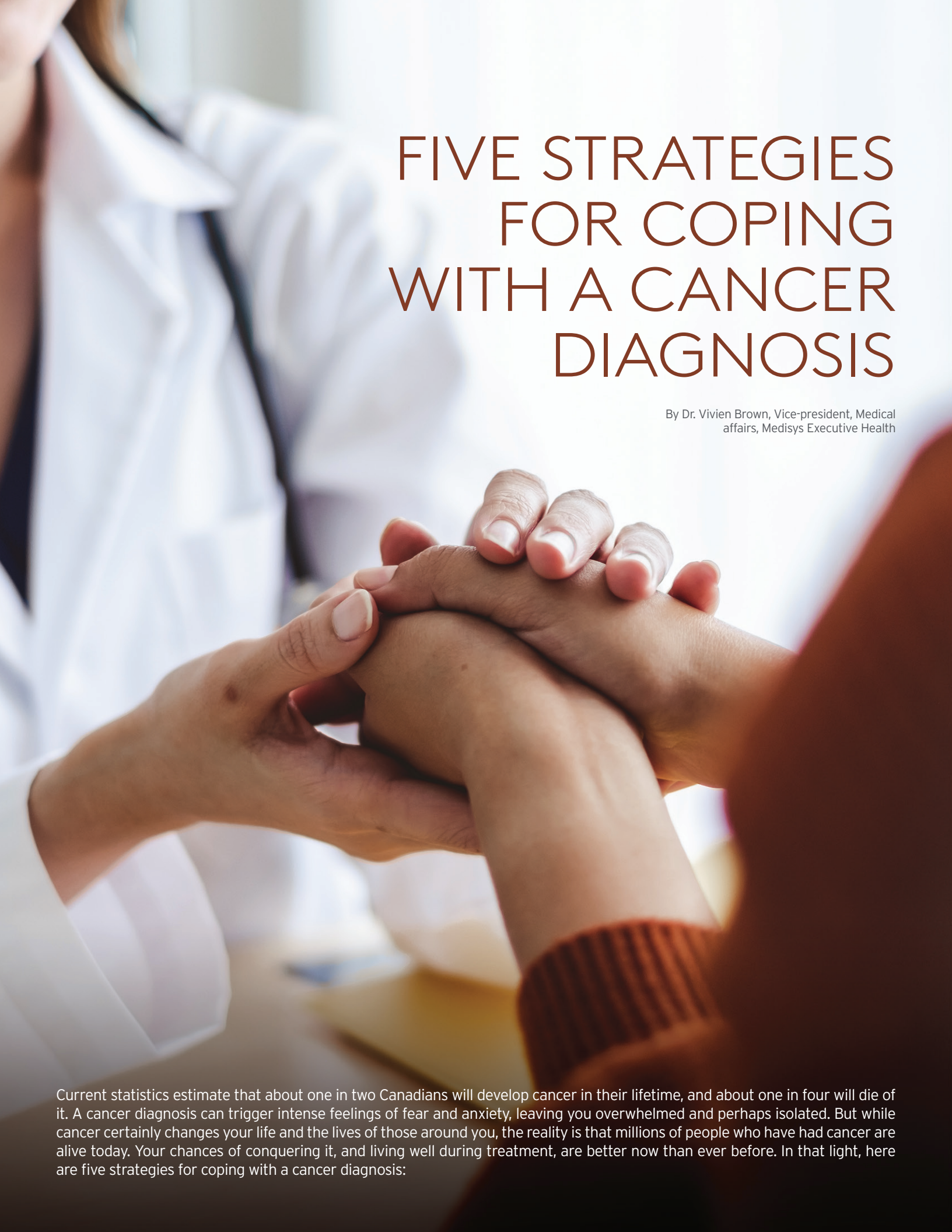
1. <https://www.cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/cancer-type/breast/statistics/?region=on>

2. <https://www.breastcancer.org/symptoms/diagnosis/invasive>

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5. <https://www.cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/cancer-type/breast/statistics/?region=on>

A close-up photograph of a doctor in a white lab coat holding a patient's hand. The doctor's hand is on the left, and the patient's hand is on the right. The patient is wearing a brown ribbed sleeve. The background is blurred, showing a clinical setting.

FIVE STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH A CANCER DIAGNOSIS

By Dr. Vivien Brown, Vice-president, Medical
affairs, Medisys Executive Health

Current statistics estimate that about one in two Canadians will develop cancer in their lifetime, and about one in four will die of it. A cancer diagnosis can trigger intense feelings of fear and anxiety, leaving you overwhelmed and perhaps isolated. But while cancer certainly changes your life and the lives of those around you, the reality is that millions of people who have had cancer are alive today. Your chances of conquering it, and living well during treatment, are better now than ever before. In that light, here are five strategies for coping with a cancer diagnosis:

1) TUNE INTO YOUR FEELINGS — ALL OF THEM

A cancer diagnosis can bring on a myriad of feelings. Sadness, guilt, loneliness, anger, jealousy and nervousness, for example, are all very normal responses.

But it's important to tune into and keep tabs on those feelings. Cancer doesn't deserve to occupy all of your time or your thoughts; if your emotional wellbeing is getting worse or your negative thoughts have lasted longer than two weeks, it's time to contact a healthcare provider, as you may be experiencing depression. Seeking help is not always easy. With Medisys On-Demand, communicate instantly with healthcare professionals ready to assist you anytime, from the comfort and privacy of your home. [Click here](#) to learn more about our virtual care services.

It's common for patients to feel that they developed cancer because of something they did or did not do, but remember: cancer can happen to anyone.

2) GET THE RIGHT INFORMATION

Some patients like to learn all the facts and details about their diagnosis and treatment options, while others prefer to let their doctor make the decisions. Neither choice is wrong, and it's important to take some time to think about which strategy makes the most sense for you.

If you choose to do your own research, commit to consulting only accredited sources like the Canadian Cancer Society, and avoid looking to Dr. Google for answers. As you gather information about different treatments and side effects, write down all of your questions and concerns to address with your doctor at your next visit so that you feel more in control and better prepared. [Here](#) is a great example of questions you may want to ask your health care team.

3) RALLY YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM

Whether you have a large network of family and friends already or still need to build a support system, your ability to lean on others can make a major difference in your treatment. It also gives those who love and care about you a sense of making a difference during a hard time.

Bringing a friend or a family member to your medical appointments can help you remember all the information the doctor provides. Accepting help in the form of grocery shopping, cooking and cleaning will free up time so that you can focus on your health, your loved ones and doing things you enjoy.

Cancer support groups can also be an excellent source of strength and a great way to glean advice from others who have been through, or are going through, exactly what you are.

Remember that some old cancer stigmas still exist, and you may find that some friends or co-workers retreat from fear of doing or saying the wrong thing. All you can do is be candid about your feelings and focus on your own wellbeing.

4) PREPARE FOR POTENTIAL PHYSICAL CHANGES

Cancer and its treatments can lead to physical changes like hair loss, skin changes, weight changes and scars that can be difficult to embrace, especially if they come as a surprise. Ask your doctors what changes to expect so that you can prepare for them and explore options that may make you feel better, like wigs, hairstyling or different makeup applications. Consult your insurance provider to find out if any of these services are covered – they often are.

Nutrition and exercise can also make a big difference in how you feel during treatment, and data suggests that those who maintain some physical exercise during cancer treatment not only cope better but also may live longer. Good nutrition and exercise also promote better sleep, relaxation and stress reduction – all vital components of a healthy life. Consider making appointments with a kinesiologist and a registered dietitian to help you develop an optimal exercise and nutrition plan to follow during treatment. [Click here](#) to learn more about our nutrition services.

5) PRIORITIZE

When cancer becomes a part of your daily life, making time for everything else can feel daunting. Try not to let your diagnosis take over. Continue setting goals and making plans – life keeps going!

Make a list of your priorities, which will of course include treatment, but make sure that doing things that you love don't fall away. Yoga, cooking, going to your book club, reading and spending time with friends and family are all activities you can – and should – continue throughout treatment. If you're unsure about continuing a certain activity you love, consult your doctor, and always listen to your body. You will have days where you feel like doing nothing at all, and that's OK.

It's also wise to evaluate your finances to see if you can afford to work less hours and/or outsource household tasks that require energy and don't support the priorities of enjoyment, spending time with loved ones and self care.

A cancer diagnosis is an incredibly difficult experience, however, having the right supports and plans in place can lessen the burden. From psychologists and physicians to dieticians and kinesiologists, Medisys' team of over 700 healthcare professionals and team members are here for you, to help you get through this difficult time and to remind you that there is hope.

Sources

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TESTIMONIAL:

MY PREVENTIVE HEALTH ASSESSMENT REVEALED A TICKING TIME-BOMB

Fifty-one-year-old Ian Gray has a lot to be thankful for – a wife and two healthy, grown children, a supportive work environment, and, thanks to a recent preventive health assessment, a properly functioning heart.

Ian is the operating partner at Ian Gray's Salmon Arm GM. In 2018, parent company Bannister Automotive Group decided to look at how they were protecting their company's assets. In addition to investing in their buildings and products, the Bannister Group decided to invest in what they believe is their greatest asset: their business partners. They did so by offering each partner the chance to complete annual health assessments at Copeman Healthcare. Even though Ian had no health concerns, when the opportunity arose, he happily got on board.



Being physically active and diet-conscious have always been a part of life for Ian as he was born with an inherited form of heart disease called bicuspid aortic valve (BAV) disease. Typically, the aortic valve has three leaflets that regulate blood flow. BAV is an aortic valve that only has two leaflets. Some people can have a bicuspid valve and never know it, while others can develop serious complications. Luckily, Ian was diagnosed at birth.

"By the age of five, I was having regular checkups to monitor the condition and was always told that I'd eventually need surgery to replace the defective valve," notes Ian. "Even so, I grew up as a healthy, active boy until I was 18 years old and the doctors told me I should stop playing junior hockey due to risk of overexertion during practice."

Ian ended up having valve replacement surgery at 21, started taking blood thinners and continued living a healthy life – even running half marathons, boxing and going to the gym. Other than a successful 2009 surgery to replace an aortic arch that had an abnormal bulge, he had no other health issues.

In January of 2019, Ian had his first annual health assessment at Copeman Healthcare. The assessment was led by Dr. Raymond McConville, and other members of his Copeman Healthcare team including a family health nurse, a registered dietitian and a kinesiologist.

"It's a very thorough assessment including bloodwork, family history, physical examination, etc. They spend the better part of the day with you, talking, listening, taking everything into consideration," said Ian.

When medically required, clients undergo a stress test that shows how the heart works during physical activity. Because exercise makes the heart pump harder and faster, an exercise stress test can reveal problems with blood flow.

Because of his history, Ian had completed several stress tests with cardiologists prior to his assessment at Copeman. It was common for Ian to fail the tests because of his condition. Typically, those failures were chalked up as false positives because of his mechanical valve. The results from Ian's stress test at Copeman indicated a fail as well.

"When the results of Ian's stress test came back positive, showing a hypertensive response to exercise, I decided to recommend additional testing," says Dr. McConville. "With any positive result we usually consider coronary CT angiography. Even with his history of BAV, I called Ian immediately, explained the situation and options for testing and set up a CT scan at Salmon Arm General Hospital.

"The scan identified that he had been leaking blood into his chest cavity just above where the aortic arch was operated on in 2009. It was a small leak, but if it had turned into a big leak, he would have bled out in a minute or two."

Ian was immediately scheduled for surgery at Kelowna General. The very difficult surgery lasted about eight hours, but in the amazing hands of the cardiac team, the surgery was a success. Since then Ian has been on the road to recovery.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

"I feel like I've won the lottery in so many ways. I'm so fortunate – to have been born in Canada, to have great work partners, for having great surgeons and for Dr. McConville and the rest of my supportive Copeman team.

"I was talking with one of the hospital's senior cardiologists and he asked about how I found out about the leak. I told him about the failed stress test, which is normal for someone with my history, but that as a precaution my doctor scheduled the scan that detected the leak. He told me, 'You should buy that physician a very nice bottle of something, because he probably saved your life. If a cardiologist had done that test, they almost certainly would have ruled it out due to BAV.'"

These days, Ian is feeling great with plans to get back into downhill skiing and has his sights set on waterskiing next summer. In the meantime, he continues with his annual Copeman health assessments and is thankful for the power of prevention.

Similar to Copeman, Medisys has a team of more than 700 health professionals across the country who are committed to giving each individual the time, care and personalized service they need to thrive. At Medisys, we believe that the key to making a long-lasting impact on the health of our clients is to use a proactive approach to identify, manage and prevent health risk issues before they become serious medical problems. To learn more about our preventive health assessments or to book an appointment, [click here](#).

We love hearing your health success stories!

Want to share an update about your own health and/or employee wellness initiatives? Contact us at

marketing@medisys.ca

to be featured on our blog, in our newsletter or on our social media channels!



Copeman Healthcare is part of Medisys Health Group. With four clinic locations in Western Canada (Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver and North Vancouver), Copeman cares for over 12,000 clients and helps people achieve a greater quality of life through physical and psychological wellness.



WHAT YOUR HANDS SAY ABOUT YOUR HEALTH

By Dr. Jean-Paul Brutus, hand surgeon and co-owner of Exception MD

Have you ever woken up at night because of numbness in your hand? Do you feel tingling in your palms? Does one of your fingers stay locked in a bent position? Have you noticed a loss in strength or dexterity? You might barely notice them at first, but over time, these symptoms often become very uncomfortable. They can also be signs of one or more serious hand disorders.

Certain symptoms require a thorough medical examination and proper diagnosis. If they aren't treated, or are treated too late, hand conditions can affect your quality of life and cause permanent damage. Keep reading for five symptoms you shouldn't ignore.

1. WAKING UP WITH NUMB FINGERS

This is likely caused by carpal tunnel syndrome. This condition, which is common after age 50, occurs when the median nerve inside the carpal tunnel in your wrist is compressed. This compression affects your hand's sensory and motor functions. It can cause a tingling sensation, pain, and in the severest cases, an inability to perform certain tasks. Symptoms often feel worse at night or while using the hands.

2. PAINFUL CATCHING AND LOCKING OF THE FINGERS

The locking of one or more fingers is a telltale sign of stenosing tenosynovitis, also known as trigger finger. This common condition is caused by a mechanical conflict between the finger's flexor tendon and the sheath that surrounds it. A thickening of the tendon impedes its normal gliding motion and causes it to catch, producing a physical sensation. This creates discomfort that can become very painful when flexing or extending the fingers. Over time, fingers can stay locked in a bent position and need to be straightened using the other hand.

3. DECREASED SENSITIVITY

Decreased sensitivity is a common side effect of various medical conditions, including cubital tunnel syndrome, caused by the entrapment of the ulnar nerve at the elbow. This disorder is typically characterized by pain and sensory loss in the ring or small fingers. Numbness can also be a sign of advanced carpal tunnel syndrome. The affected fingers are usually the thumb, index finger, middle finger, and half of the ring finger, in other words the fingers innervated by the median nerve.

4. WEAKNESS

A loss of strength can have many underlying causes. Patients suffering from advanced carpal tunnel syndrome often notice muscle weakness in their hands and wrists. Compression of the median nerve at the elbow, a condition called lacertus syndrome, can also cause a decrease in strength and a reduced ability to grasp objects. In some cases, weakness may be related to a more serious neurological or neuromuscular disorder, such as multiple sclerosis (MS) or Parkinson's disease.

5. LOSS OF FINE MOTOR SKILLS

Clumsiness (for example, dropping things), decreased endurance (hands and forearms that tire quickly) and difficulty picking objects up or doing certain meticulous tasks are signs that suggest damage to the median nerve at the elbow. The likely culprit is usually lacertus syndrome.

DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT

A physical examination and a history of symptoms are used to diagnose hand conditions, while imaging tests and specific maneuvers can confirm a diagnosis and determine the best course of treatment. Over the past 15 years, major advances have significantly improved how a variety of conditions can be treated with surgery. Several procedures can now be performed using local anaesthesia, without requiring hospitalization or long recovery periods.

Our hands can tell us a lot about our overall health. Don't brush off your symptoms. If you're experiencing discomfort or have noticed unusual symptoms, speak with your Medisys physician during your Preventive Health Assessment or communicate instantly with a healthcare professional with Medisys On-Demand. If medically required, you may receive a referral to see a specialist. The earlier a condition is diagnosed and the faster it's treated, the more likely you are to experience a full recovery. [**Click here**](#) to learn more about our preventive health and virtual care services.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dr. Jean-Paul Brutus is a specialized and passionate hand surgeon whose practice focuses exclusively on treating conditions of the hand, using the most state-of-the-art and least invasive treatment techniques. He is the co-owner of Exception MD, a private clinic dedicated to the treatment of the upper and lower limbs. [**Click here**](#) to learn more.

GOOD HEALTH DOESN'T ALWAYS COME EASY; YOU HAVE TO WORK FOR IT.



What you eat and how you choose to live each day contributes to how you will feel now, and in the years to come. Our annual Preventive Health Assessments not only screen for potential risk factors for diseases, but also provide individualized counselling and health management plans to help you adopt and maintain healthy habits for life.

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