



## Coping With Chronic Cancer

How one woman strives and thrives by Margaret Jaworski

The first thing you might notice about Regina Jabbour is her eye-catching buzz cut, followed by her luminous eyes and smile, lustrous skin, toned body and palpable energy.

What you can't tell by simply looking at Regina is that she has stage 4 metastatic breast cancer, which means the cancer is in the bone.

"It is a circumstance I must deal with," says Regina, a lawyer for the New York State Workers' Compensation Board. "But it can't have my heart, my soul or my peace of mind."

Regina works hard to nourish her positive state of mind through meditation, visualization and relaxation. Her belief in God feeds her spirit, while exercise keeps her body strong. She reads books that inspire and invigorate; she goes to the gym; she walks her dogs; she prays; and she works. "Work keeps me engaged," says Regina. "Without it, I'd spend too much time dissecting every ache and pain."

Regina's journey began in 1995, not long after her 40th birthday, when a mammogram and sonogram showed suspicious areas in both breasts. Biopsies confirmed an aggressive cancer. "I saw about a dozen doctors and in the end had a double mastectomy and breast

reconstruction with saline implants," Regina says.

Seven months of chemotherapy followed, taking her wild black hair; the cancer ended her engagement. Through it all, Regina's friends and family enveloped her with affection and support. "We were there for her one hundred percent," says Donna Quinn, one of the six Jabbour sisters.

In February 2004, after almost nine years in remission, Regina's cancer returned, settling in the bone. Once again, her family rallied. Her sister Anita, a nurse, often accompanied her to doctor's appointments. Her sister Donna, a kidney cancer survivor, recalls stepping in with "a concrete plan of action,

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For more about Regina's remarkable journey, visit [HealthyUpdates.com/cancer](http://HealthyUpdates.com/cancer)

whether to clarify an unclear point with a doctor or figure out practical steps to help Regina handle her fear."

Regina will likely always be on chemo or another treatment. "In metastatic disease, there's a small chance of cure," she says. "Some people go into remission, and most live with it as a chronic disease. I consider all of these options a win."

Her most recent scans indicate "less cancer and stable disease," Regina says, smiling. "My oncologist told me to keep doing what I'm doing. She said she can only take me 50 percent of the way. I must do the rest myself." ■

### BREAST CANCER: A CHRONIC CONDITION?

Because of better understanding of breast cancer biology, doctors now view some types of metastatic breast cancer as treatable chronic illnesses. "There are multiple presentations of the disease, many sub-

types requiring different treatments," says Maria Theodoulou, M.D., Regina's doctor, who's with Breast Medicine Service at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in NYC. For people like Regina, that may mean lengthy or lifelong treatment. But newer therapies tend to be less toxic, with fewer bad days. "We have gentler chemotherapies that don't affect the 'innocent bystander' organs," explains Dr. Theodoulou.