

MORE THAN

just WORDS



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A Black Woman's Guide to “The Breast Cancer Talk” With Doctors

Talking with your doctor about a breast cancer concern can be very scary, especially for Black women like us, who are almost 41% more likely to die from breast cancer than white women.¹

Here is a guide with advice from *More Than Just Words* Advisor Dr Monique Gary to help you with what to expect – and what not to accept – during your visit at the doctor's office. We also recommend bringing a loved one or care partner with you to your appointment for additional support.

As an initial step to better understand your own breast health, you can take either the [NIH Risk Assessment Tool \(The Gail Model\)*](#) or the [Black Women's Health Study Risk Calculator*](#) and share what you learn with your doctor. The more you know about your risk, the more you can advocate for your care.

*These links take you to external websites that are independently operated and not managed by Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation. Novartis assumes no responsibility for these sites.

3%

of practicing oncologists are Black, which means you most likely aren't working with doctors who look like us.² Dr Gary shares this may contribute to miscommunication, creating a barrier to access quality, consistent, and culturally competent care.

We hope this guide will help you have more meaningful conversations with your doctor.

Do you feel you have a trusting relationship with your doctor?

The standard-of-care should be your doctor treating you as they would their family or loved ones. If you're feeling like your doctor isn't an ally during your breast cancer experience, here's how you can address those concerns:

- ✓ **Make a list of key questions to discuss with your doctor during your appointment and ask follow-up questions if needed**
- ✓ **Mirror or repeat what is being said to help absorb what's being said by your doctor**
- ✓ **Ask your doctor for resources to review after your appointment**
- ✓ **Invite your doctor to view things from your perspective**
- ✓ **Take notes or pictures of what you discuss with your doctor, including their recommended care plan and next steps**

Musts at Your Doctor's Visit

If any of these steps aren't addressed, feel empowered to ask your doctor for them

At your primary care visit:

1

A Thorough Breast Exam

(Including ordering of a mammogram if you qualify because of your age/family history)

2

Family History/ Genetic Testing Discussion

3

Ordering of Additional Imaging

(scans/3D imaging)

4

Time for Q and A

5

A Follow-up Plan

(Including a discussion on recommended treatments/monitoring)

There may be conversations that seem invasive or uncomfortable. Here are some topics your doctors should discuss with you that may be important for your diagnosis and care.

Breasts:

The density of your breasts can determine the type of imaging you may need and be offered. Doctors should be having a conversation with you about breast density. If your breasts are very dense, you may be prescribed a 3D mammogram, whole breast ultrasound, or possibly magnetic resonance imaging.^{3,4}

Overall Health:

Your doctor should focus on your overall wellness including, but not limited to, weight. While it is standard for offices to record your weight and body mass index (BMI) as per medical guidelines, your doctor should also be asking about your daily practices and activity levels.

Family History:

Doctors will often ask you about your maternal and paternal family medical histories. It's okay if you don't have access to that information. Instead, you can ask your doctor about your options for genetic testing to help fill in those gaps.

Questions to ask if you feel like your doctor is dismissing your concerns

✓ "Should we look at this further with imaging (scans, tests)?"

✓ "How can we be sure (that it is/is not a concern)?"

✓ "When can we have a follow-up exam or appointment?"

✓ "Are you sure this is the best treatment for me? Has this been successful for other people like me?"

✓ "Is this included in the medical guidelines? Where?"

✓ "Are there any options to modify my treatment plan if I'm finding my side effects too hard to tolerate?"

Need More Time?

At the end of your appointment, there should always be time for feedback, questions, and answers. While oftentimes doctors have several patients booked in a day, and they may also try to complete notes about your visit, you should not feel rushed. If you feel that your needs are not being addressed, here are some ways to ask for more time or clarity.

✓ **"Can you pause from your notes for a minute?"**

Then, ask your follow-up questions

✓ **"Can you explain to me what should I expect between now and our next visit?"**

✓ **"What I'm hearing you say is..."** Then repeat what you are hearing in your own words

✓ **"I need a little more time, can we schedule a follow-up?"**

✓ **"Does your office offer any assistance to locate support groups or more resources?"**

Was That a Biased or Racist Response?

Unfortunately, Dr Gary calls out that there are times when health care professionals may have racial biases toward patients. Here are some examples of red flags that may be a sign that you should seek a second opinion.

✓ **Racially insensitive or derogatory comments**

✓ **Assumptions based on racial stereotypes**

✓ **Expectations that you should be able to endure discomfort or pain**

If something is making you feel uncomfortable, don't be afraid to trust your gut. Your feelings are valid, and it's okay to seek a second opinion or find a different doctor.

About More Than Just Words

We created the *More Than Just Words* (www.MoreThanJustWords.US) initiative for you in a commitment to promote health equity across breast cancer care, where it is much needed. We support programs that raise awareness of existing disparities across breast cancer care, stress the importance of screening or receiving care as soon as possible, and work to develop solutions to this gap, including addressing the bias held by health care providers.

1. American Cancer Society. *Cancer Facts & Figures for African American/Black People 2022-2024*. Atlanta: American Cancer Society, 2022.
2. Winkfield KM, Levitt LA, Tibbitts M, et al. Addressing Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion of Black Physicians in the Oncology Workforce. *JCO Oncology Practice*. 2021 Feb 26;17(5). doi:10.1200/JOP.21.0007963
3. Bakker MF, de Lange SV, Pijnappel RM, et al. Supplemental MRI Screening for Women with Extremely Dense Breast Tissue. *N Engl J Med*. 2019;381(22):2091-2102. doi:10.1056/NEJMoa1903986
4. American Cancer Society. *Breast Density and Your Mammogram Report*. (2019, April). Retrieved June 17, 2021, from <https://www.cancer.org/content/dam/cancer-org/cancer-control/en/booklets-flyers/breast-density-and-your-mammogram-report-handout.pdf>