

FREE

# ***BE BRAVE... THEY'RE YOUR BREASTS***

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***A STORY ABOUT  
A LATINA WOMAN  
AND HOW THE  
PROCESS OF  
LEARNING ABOUT  
BREAST HEALTH  
TRANSFORMED  
HER LIFE.***



***THE STORY OF IVETTE***

## Symptoms

Different people have different warning signs for breast cancer. Some people do not have any signs or symptoms at all. A person may find out he or she has breast cancer after a routine mammogram.

Some warning signs of breast cancer are:<sup>1</sup>

- A lump in the breast or underarm (armpit).
- Thickening or swelling of part of the breast.
- Irritation or dimpling of breast skin.
- Redness or flaky skin in the nipple area or on the breast.
- Pulling in of the nipple or pain in the nipple area.
- Nipple discharge other than breast milk, including blood.
- Any change in the size or the shape of the breast.
- Pain in any part of the breast.

Keep in mind that some of these warning signs can happen with other conditions that are not cancer. If you have any signs that worry you, be sure to see your doctor right away.

<sup>1</sup>Osteen, R. Breast Cancer. In: Lenhard RE, Osteen RT, Gansler R, eds. *Clinical Oncology*. Atlanta, GA: American Cancer Society; 2001:251–268

Sources: Division of Cancer Prevention and Control, and the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

## Some Myths and Common Misconceptions about Cancer<sup>1</sup>

*I've heard that cancer only afflicts people whose family members have or have had cancer. Is cancer hereditary?*

Breast cancer is not always hereditary. Most breast cancer cases occur in people who have no family history with breast cancer.

*If the cancer is removed through surgery or a biopsy, could it spread to other parts of the body?*

Some people worry that cancer surgery or a biopsy makes the disease spread. Neither surgery nor a biopsy will cause the cancer to spread.

*If I have cancer, I'll know it because it will hurt. That's why I only have to be tested for cancer if I have pain. Right?*

Only in very rare cases does breast cancer cause pain. That's why you need to become familiar with how your breasts feel and look. If you notice any change, you should notify your doctor right away.

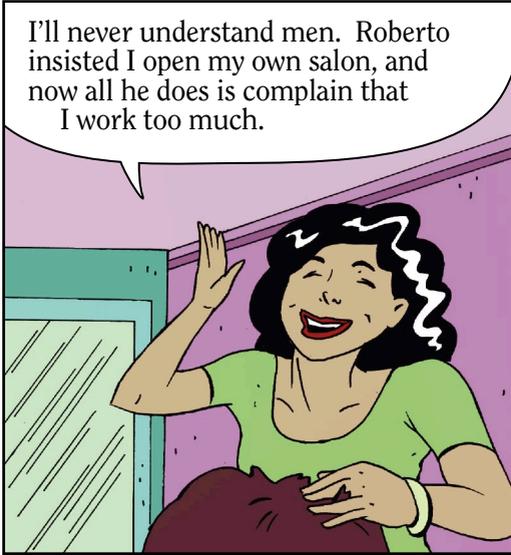
*I bumped my breast, and a few days later I saw that it was bruised. Do bruises on the breast cause breast cancer?*

No, being hit or bumped on the breast does not cause breast cancer.

*Are there herbs that can cure cancer?*

Some cancer patients take herbs (such as cat's claw, chaparral and noni juice) hoping that they'll help cure the cancer. But current scientific studies have not found any herb or combination of herbs that cure cancer. Patients who take herbs, or who are thinking of taking herbs, should discuss it with their doctors. Some herbs could cause harm on their own or if combined with common cancer treatments, such as chemotherapy. Furthermore, some herbs can keep other treatments or medicines from working properly.

<sup>1</sup>This list is an edited excerpt from the list of myths and common misconceptions about cancer from the Spanish web site of the National Cancer Institute.





I have to go back next week for the results. He told me to bring a family member or friend.

But nobody in our family has ever had breast cancer.



You know I can't quit work now. Gerardo has only one more year before he graduates from high school.

Who said you have to quit your job?



I don't know. I have a bad feeling. Don't tell anyone. I don't want Gerardo to know.

Calm down. You know a lot of people survive breast cancer today.



Oh, God, could I have something bad, too? That's probably why I'm so tired all the time.



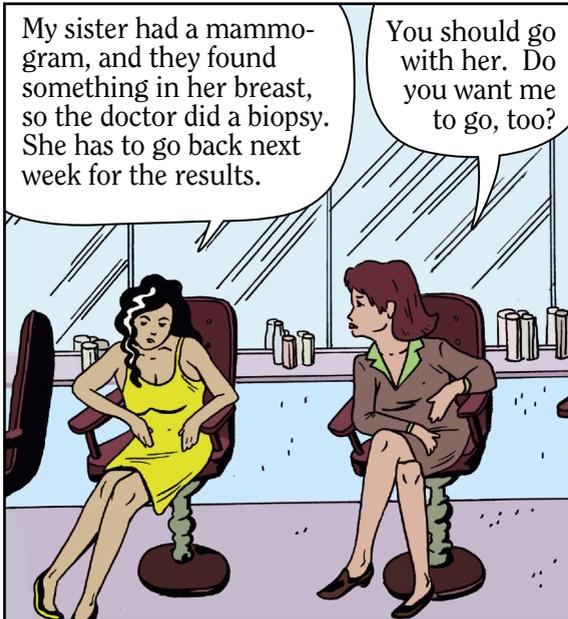
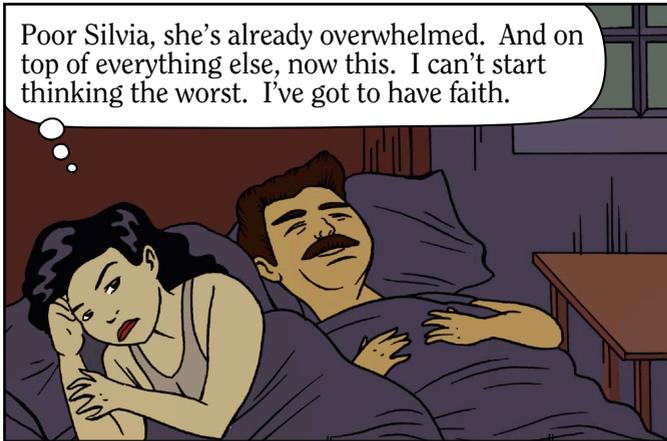
When was the last time we had a hot meal around here? You're so busy you barely notice me.



Look, I'm in no mood. I didn't get a break all day.

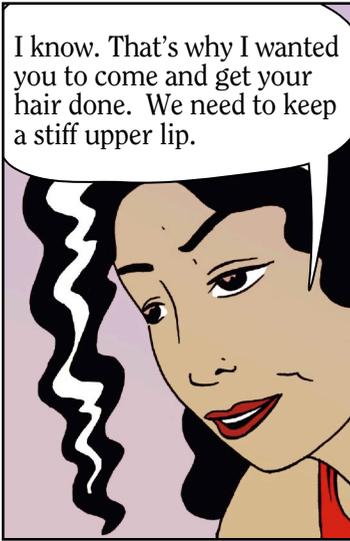
You work too hard, woman.

Weren't you the one that wanted me to have my own salon, too?





All this has gotten me so depressed, Ivette.



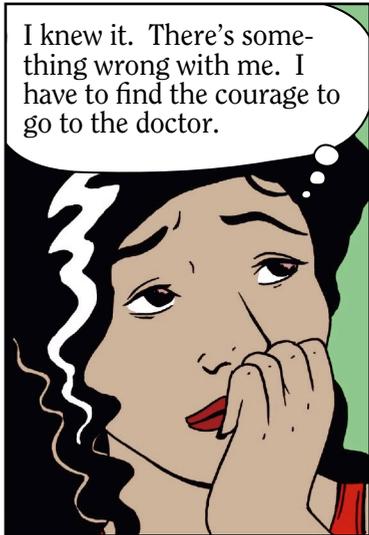
I know. That's why I wanted you to come and get your hair done. We need to keep a stiff upper lip.



And waiting for the biopsy results makes me so anxious.



What's wrong with you? You look pale, Ivette.



I knew it. There's something wrong with me. I have to find the courage to go to the doctor.



It's the salon. There's so much pressure. I should never have taken that loan.

Doesn't Roberto help out?



Lately I feel like he doesn't understand me.

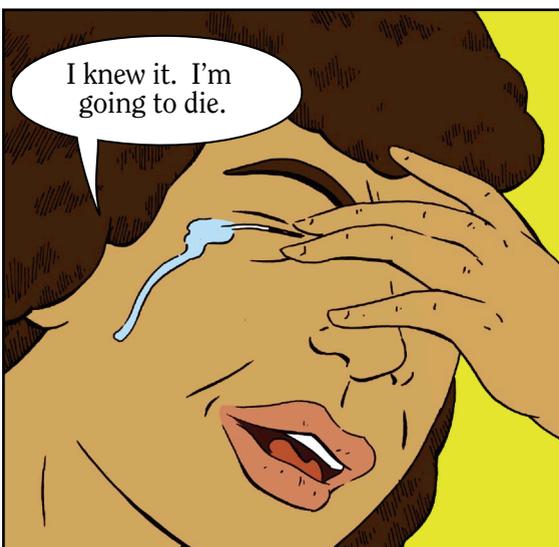
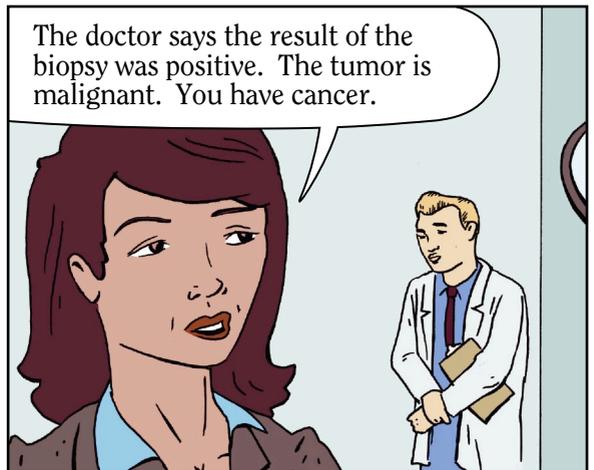
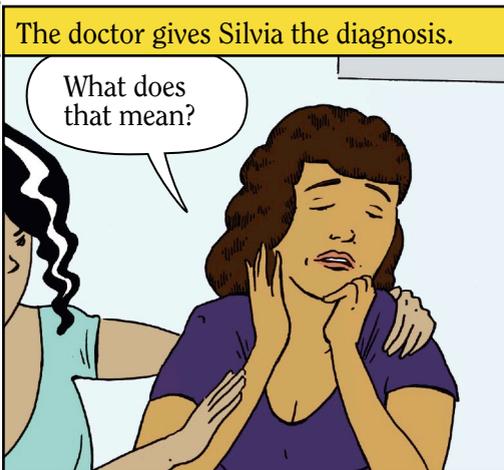
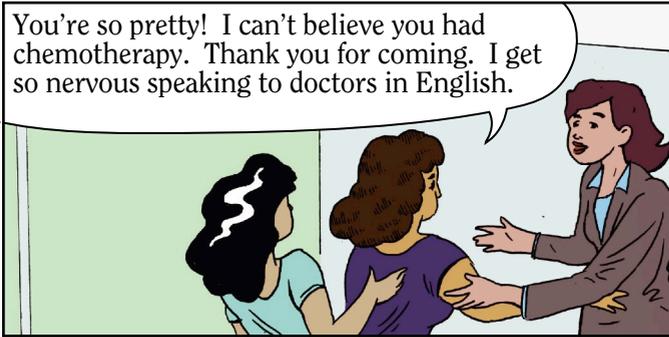
You're not alone. You have us.

Don't complain. Roberto is a good husband. You don't know how alone I feel right now.

If this turns out to be bad, how am I going to tell my boy?



I have a friend who can help us. A client. She's a breast cancer survivor and works for SHARE, an organization that gives support to women going through this.



We'll remove the tumor and any tissue around it that may have cancer cells. This is called a lumpectomy. The surgery and the pathology report will determine the treatment to follow, but a lumpectomy is usually followed by radiation and other treatments. It all depends on the pathology report.



Don't be afraid. The doctor says he'll remove the tumor and any tissue around it that has cancer cells. This is called a lumpectomy, and it's usually followed by radiation and other treatments. It all depends on the pathology report.



How much work will I have to miss?

Don't worry about the money, Silvia. I'll help you.



You? You're already up to your neck with that loan.

I'll never abandon you. Besides, Jacqueline is going to give me a list of organizations and programs that can help us. And she told me that the recovery from a lumpectomy is pretty fast. In most cases, women go home the same day.



I'm so confused. I don't know what to think.

If you're not sure, you can get a second opinion. A lot of women do it. It's your right and your life.

Is it true that the cancer could spread because of the surgery?



No, that's not true. But if you have any other questions, you should ask the doctor directly. Something that has always helped me is to make a list of questions before seeing the doctor. We have to learn to be in charge of our own health.





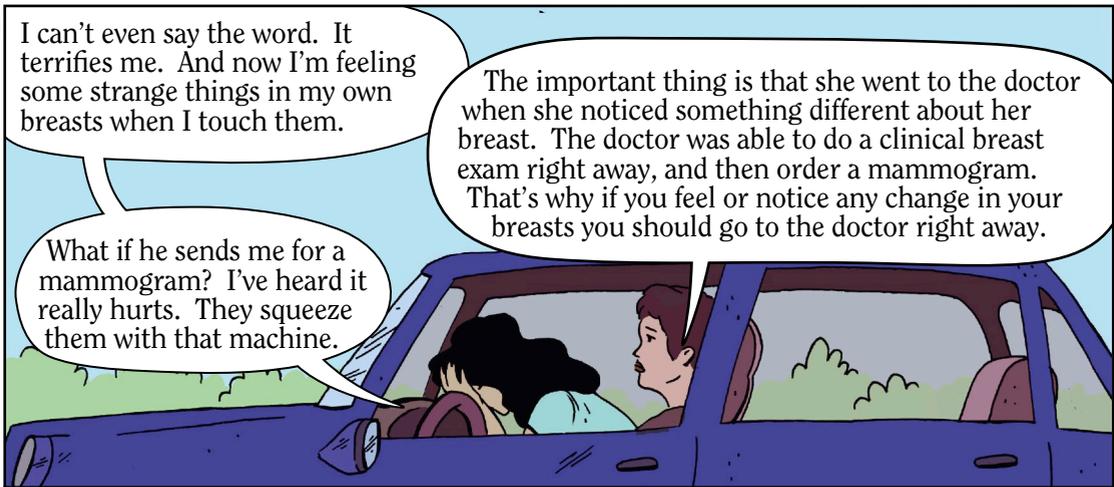
I would have liked to stay with Silvia, but she didn't want me to.

It's not going to be easy but, like any mother, she'll find a way to tell her son.



I can't believe my sister has...

Breast cancer.



I can't even say the word. It terrifies me. And now I'm feeling some strange things in my own breasts when I touch them.

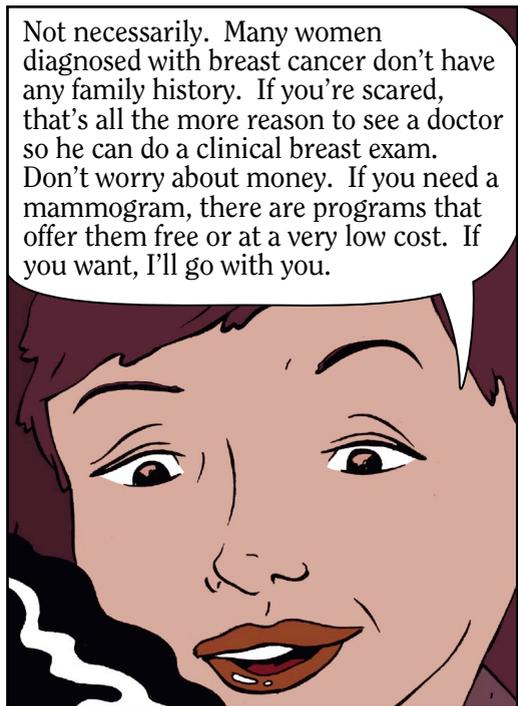
What if he sends me for a mammogram? I've heard it really hurts. They squeeze them with that machine.

The important thing is that she went to the doctor when she noticed something different about her breast. The doctor was able to do a clinical breast exam right away, and then order a mammogram. That's why if you feel or notice any change in your breasts you should go to the doctor right away.



It only takes a few minutes. Mammography is the best technology available, and the one used most to detect breast cancer, even if you haven't felt anything yourself. It's worth it for your health and peace of mind.

What if I have the same thing as my sister? I could have it, too.



Not necessarily. Many women diagnosed with breast cancer don't have any family history. If you're scared, that's all the more reason to see a doctor so he can do a clinical breast exam. Don't worry about money. If you need a mammogram, there are programs that offer them free or at a very low cost. If you want, I'll go with you.

At Ivette's house.

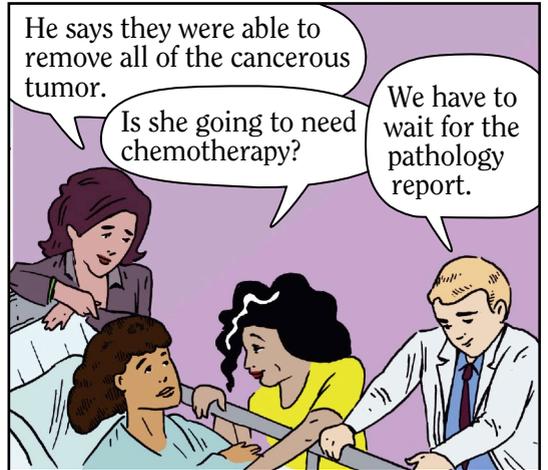
Gerardo told me everything. That's why you've been acting so strange lately.

We have to be there for your Aunt Silvia and your cousin Gerardo.

Why didn't you tell me?

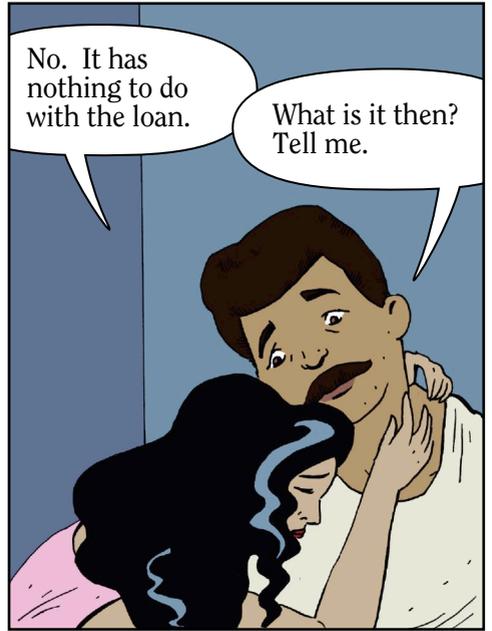
She begged me not to tell anyone.

You'd never keep anything like that from me, right? That's what I'm here for.





You're still so depressed. We have to be thankful that Silvia's surgery went well. Are you that worried about the loan? You're hiding something from me. I know you. Are you late on the payments?



No. It has nothing to do with the loan.

What is it then? Tell me.



It's just that I never touch my breasts. But now with Silvia...when I touch them I feel strange things, and I can't help thinking the worst.



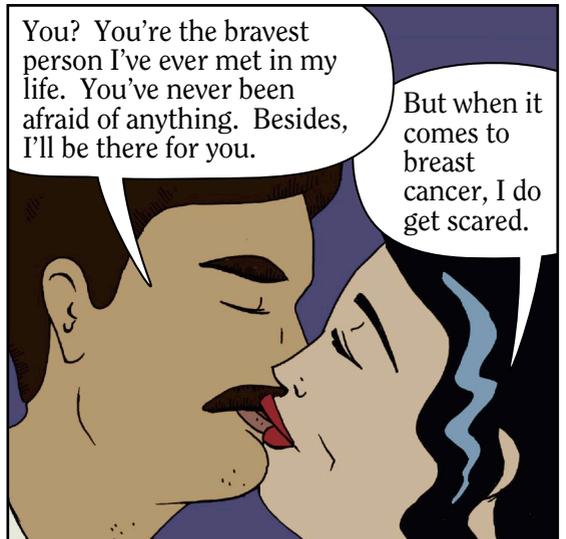
Are you afraid there's something wrong with you, too?

I'm not afraid, I'm terrified. Would you love me the same if I had breast cancer?



How could you doubt me like that? I know you wouldn't leave me either at a time like this.

I panic when I think of what the doctor might say.



You? You're the bravest person I've ever met in my life. You've never been afraid of anything. Besides, I'll be there for you.

But when it comes to breast cancer, I do get scared.

In the mammogram exam room.

Try not to move. Just one more minute. Are you uncomfortable?

Yes, a little. Sorry. I'm so nervous.



Don't worry. We're almost done.

It's really not as bad as I'd heard.

CLICK  
CLICK



The mammogram was fine, Roberto. I'm so happy, I feel like a new woman.



Silvia is recovering so well from the surgery!

But she gets depressed sometimes. The thought of having chemotherapy scares her.



You have to stay positive. Some women don't need chemotherapy. Besides, if I beat it, she can too. These days there are a lot of medications to help counteract the side effects of chemotherapy.



I wish there were more people like you. We are so grateful to you and the organization you work for. And I have good news for you. I went to the doctor. She did a breast exam, and sent me for a mammogram. It was scary...but everything turned out fine. I'm so relieved. I should have done it sooner.



I didn't call you because Roberto offered to go with me. I didn't even have to ask him.



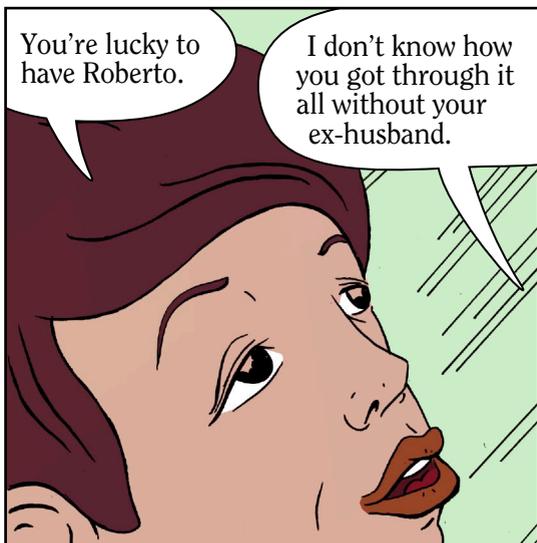
You should establish a relationship with your doctor, and discuss how often you need to see him and get a mammogram.

I know that now. Roberto said he'll be in charge of reminding me.



You're lucky to have Roberto.

I don't know how you got through it all without your ex-husband.



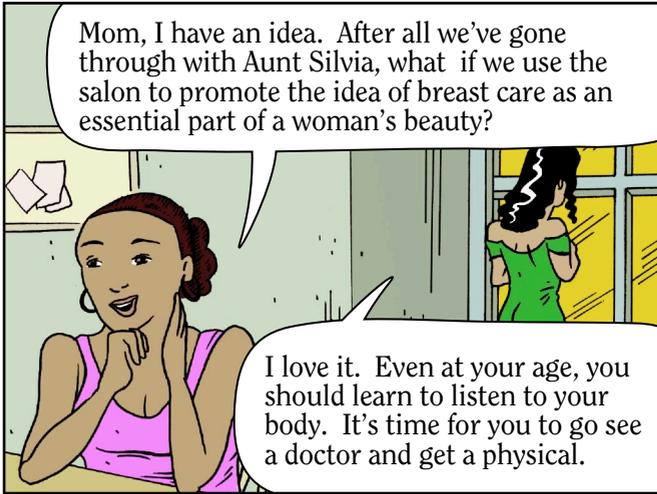
Thanks to my friends, people like you and most of all SHARE, who supported me and my family during such a difficult time.

I remember they even offered support to your ex-husband.



But by the time he decided to come back, I had already become a different woman. Cancer taught me to value each moment, and gave new meaning to my life with my new husband. And look at me now. I'm about to celebrate fifteen years of survival.



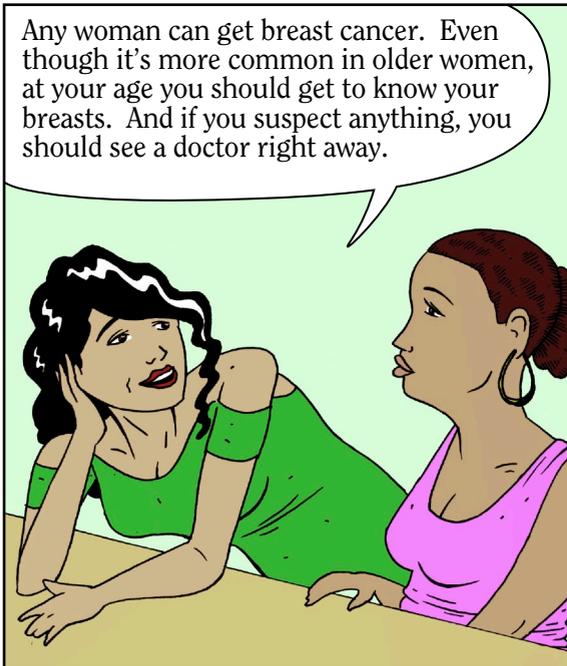


Mom, I have an idea. After all we've gone through with Aunt Silvia, what if we use the salon to promote the idea of breast care as an essential part of a woman's beauty?

I love it. Even at your age, you should learn to listen to your body. It's time for you to go see a doctor and get a physical.



Don't worry about me. At my age nothing is going to happen.



Any woman can get breast cancer. Even though it's more common in older women, at your age you should get to know your breasts. And if you suspect anything, you should see a doctor right away.



You're right. Better safe than sorry.

Never be afraid to go and talk to a doctor if you have any concerns about a medical condition. We have to inform ourselves, and not believe everything people say.



Yes, Mom, because we're all in this together.

It's time for us Latinas to be responsible and take charge of our health. By taking care of ourselves, we're taking care of our people. Because it's your life, my life, and the life of every woman around us.

*Dear Latina sister:*

*I want to let you know that establishing a good relationship with your doctor is very important for the health of your breasts and your whole body. A successful doctor-patient relationship depends on clear communication and collaboration. To make this happen, we need to realize that in many cases our language and our culture might be different from our doctor's.*

*We must take into consideration the fact that the doctor sees many patients a day, so when you arrive at the office it is a good idea to ask for the help of a translator, if you need one. That way, you and the doctor will be helping each other. As a group, we are timid, especially when it comes to the examination of our breasts or other private parts of our bodies. Tell the doctor if you feel embarrassed or anxious so that he or she understands you better and can provide you better care.*

*Doctors are busy professionals who value the time they spend with you during your appointment. But they need your cooperation. Make a list of your questions for the doctor so you can use your time together in the best possible way.*

*My doctor told me that I should see her once a year, and get the tests that she thinks I need. I'm going to do what she says. You should, too—for yourself and for your loved ones.*

*The doctor is your best ally for good health. Remember to address all your health questions, especially about your breasts, to your doctor. Don't believe everything people say.*

*Sister, I hope this advice helps you as much as it helped me. Today, I have such a good relationship with my doctor that I've even gotten over my fear of breast exams.*

*-Ivette*



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### ***For Information and Support***

**SHARE: (Self-Help for Women with Breast or Ovarian Cancer)**

[www.sharecancersupport.org/espanol](http://www.sharecancersupport.org/espanol) (866) 891-2392

SHARE is an organization of breast and ovarian cancer survivors offering support, information, and resources to people affected by these diseases. SHARE was founded in 1976, and our services include telephone support, support groups, educational forums, advocacy activities and public health initiatives in both English and Spanish. All of SHARE's programs are free of charge.

**National Cancer Institute**

[www.cancer.gov/espanol](http://www.cancer.gov/espanol) (800) 422-6237

This agency of the federal government conducts and supports research, training, health information dissemination, and other programs with respect to the cause, diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of cancer, rehabilitation from cancer, and the continuing care of cancer patients and the families of cancer patients.

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

[www.cdc.gov/spanish](http://www.cdc.gov/spanish) (800) 232-4636

The source for credible health information on the Internet. The Centers promote good health and quality of life through the prevention and control of disease, injury and disability.

**American Cancer Society**

[www.cancer.org/espanol](http://www.cancer.org/espanol) (800) 227-2345

An organization of volunteers, the American Cancer Society offers services to cancer patients and their families. It sponsors research and education programs and support services, including printed materials.

**311**

311 is New York City's online website and phone number for government information. Get information about women's health and mammogram programs.

### ***You have the power, spread the word***

I want to hear from you and know what you've learned from our novela. Write to me at my e-mail address, [Ivette@sharecancersupport.org](mailto:Ivette@sharecancersupport.org). You can also help our community, join us and be part of this group of brave women.