The Pink Age

How come no one tells us how cancer drastically ages the body externally?

November 18, 2020 By Megan-Claire Chase

Breast cancer is glamourized to look pretty, easy and fun. The commercials also show older women smiling with makeup on. No wonder other cancers hate us. I was diagnosed under 40 years old with stage IIA invasive lobular breast cancer five years ago. How come no one tells us how cancer drastically ages the body externally? Many of us internally feel older due to permanent side effects and other illnesses that were triggered by our cancer treatments and surgeries. I honestly never thought my face and neck would age.

Yes, I have always been on the vain side. When I was growing up, I performed in community theatre and ballet which meant always looking in the mirror. I always used to look years younger than my actual age, even in my early 30's. This rapid aging is tough to accept because no amount of creams or concealer can fully cover it up.

I first noticed the aging of my neck four years ago. It used to be so smooth. Now it looks like lines of multilayered necklaces going down it. Quite shocking to see in the mirror. Why did I age in that area?

I honestly believe it has something to do with the radiation burns that went up the left side of my neck. I could see the beginning of lines then. I'll never understand why I burned so terribly in so many areas (neck, back, under arm) aside from my left breast. Radiation was just as painful and horrific as chemo. That's why I get so upset with another patients say radiation is a breeze. My flesh burned off on my under arm near the area of where my tumor once was. Yep, you read that right. It literally burned off. I felt like burned bacon. I know what it feels like to be a burn patient. The pain was excruciating.

These pictures below still make me cringe. By the end of my 33 treatments, the layered lines had formed completely down my neck. Instantly looking 20 years older in that area. As I look at this area now, it's always irritated and itchy. It feels rough to the touch and scaly. Thanks to COVID-19, I haven't been able to see my dermatologist. Why is it continuously itchy? I don't use perfume or any lovely smelling lotions on it. It's a big eye sore when I wear any type of shirt because there is no way to hide it unless I wear a scarf. I feel extremely self-conscious about it.

Courtesy of Megan-Claire Chase

It has taken a full three years for the dark panda circles under my eyes to fade enough to where I no longer need to wear a pound of concealer to attempt covering them up. I only need half a pound these days. As you can see below in the pictures from four years ago, nothing could fully cover them up back then. Aside from looking fatigued, I looked haunted.

Me then and me now on a really good hair and makeup dayCourtesy of Megan-Claire Chase

It’s only recently that I no longer need a pound of makeup to cover the visibly aging skin. I just need half a pound instead! Seriously though, I continue to struggle with externally looking so different and just so much older. Then add medically induced menopause to the mix, and all hell has broken loose.

It has been four years since the radiation days, and I don’t know my skin post-cancer. It’s dry and scaly in some areas now. The skin underneath my eyes took one of the biggest beatings due to constant rubbing and contact dermatitis. I was constantly trying different creams trying to find the right one to truly hydrate my skin.

I finally got to the bottom of the contact dermatitis that was so painful last summer. After an allergy test at the dermatologist, I’m allergic to the dye in antibacterial soap. Every single time I was washing my hands and using the orange colored antibacterial at home and at the cancer center and using orange or green colored hand sanitizer, I would touch my eyes to wash my face with clean hands not knowing my fingertips were causing the irritation. Now everything is clear including hand sanitizer.

Don’t even get me started on my lips! They used to be smooth. Ever since the chemo days, I continually struggle with peeling and cracked skin on each corner of my mouth. Fortunately, my dermatologist gave me some cream that I use on my lips and under my eyes to help with the dryness but it’s not a permanent fix. I never know what will cause another skin flareup. It’s a good thing I am chronically single and a hair away from being thrown into a convent because these lips would only be kissable for an alligator.

It just boggles my mind that all this aging happened without zero warning. The physical changes are just so jarring. To everyone else, I look super healthy. Once the makeup comes off, I look a little gray, burned, wrinkly, and forever fatigued. A constant reminder of the trauma which is why I can’t ever NOT think about my cancer experience. It stares me in the face and plagues me daily.

Until next time,

Warrior Megsie

This post originally appeared on Life on the Cancer Train on October 4, 2020. It is republished with permission.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/blog/pink-age