

Our Fight. Our Future.



How Ashlynn's cancer journey transformed her from a "cancer misfit" to a powerful advocate for other cancer patients.



Ashlynn Gomez - Corpus Christi

Ashlynn was just 23 when her life was turned upside down by a diagnosis she never imagined she would receive: stage II breast cancer. It was June 2, 2020, and Ashlynn was studying to become a medical assistant, while juggling several part-time jobs and simply trying to make ends meet. Cancer wasn't even a consideration when she noticed the red dot on her breast, something she initially dismissed as a spider bite. But it didn't go away. Ashlynn finally reached out to her primary care doctor who examined her and referred her for further testing. Soon, she received the devastating news which would change her life. Alone and napping, Ashlynn was jolted awake, first by the phone and then by the words "stage II breast cancer." In her drowsiness she thought she misunderstood, "I'm sorry, what did you say?" What followed was a wave of medical terminology she couldn't even begin to process. After finding the words to tell her family and fiancé, Ashlynn began navigating the cancer world, where she quickly learned she needed to find the words to advocate for herself.

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I was 23, working part-time while going to school. There's no way I could have paid for all of that without CPRIT.

-Ashlynn Gomez

When her first oncologist in Corpus Christi brushed off Ashlynn's concerns about the potential for her cancer to spread, she walked out and requested a referral to MD Anderson, one of the top cancer centers in the country. Getting in wasn't easy, but she persisted, phoning and pleading with decision-makers, saying through tears, "I don't want to die." Once Ashlynn made it to MD Anderson, her diagnosis was revised from stage II to stage III triple-negative breast cancer, one of the most aggressive and difficult-to-treat forms of the disease. She began the grueling treatment process, including 17 rounds of chemotherapy, a lumpectomy with reconstruction, and 31 rounds of radiation. She also enrolled in the ARTEMIS clinical trial, thanks in part to funding from the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas (CPRIT), which supports groundbreaking cancer research and expands access to promising clinical trials for Texans.

The physical and emotional toll was immense. Ashlynn recalls the night she lost her hair. "I had put it in a braid, and then the entire braid just fell off," she says. "My grandma and I cried a lot because it made the cancer feel very real." She chokes up when she recalls how her young cousin reacted when seeing her bald head, asking Ashlynn why she looked like a monster. "That moment really broke me," she admits. "I thought 'Is this how the world sees me now?'" "As much as I adored my family and friends, nobody truly understood what I was going through," she explains. It wasn't until she finished her last radiation treatment almost 9 months later that she began to find healing within the cancer community. Connecting with other young adults with cancer and joining support groups helped Ashlynn to finally feel seen. It also strengthened her resolve to turn her pain into purpose. She got involved with the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN), Living Beyond Breast Cancer and Making Stides. She also began advocating at the policy level to help others facing cancer have access to screenings and treatments that could save their lives.

