



cancer.org | 1.800.227.2345

If You're a Man with Breast Cancer

- [What is breast cancer?](#)
- [Are there different kinds of breast cancer?](#)
- [Tests that may be done](#)
- [What kind of treatment will I need?](#)
- [What will happen after treatment?](#)

What is breast cancer?

Cancer can start any place in the body. Cancer that starts in the breast is called breast cancer. It starts when cells in the breast grow out of control and crowd out normal cells.

Breast cancer is most common in women, but men can get it, too. Many people do not realize that men have breast tissue and that they can develop breast cancer.

Cancer cells can spread to other parts of the body. Cancer cells in the breast can sometimes travel to the bone and grow there. When cancer cells do this, it's called metastasis (pronounced meh-TAS-tuh-sis). To doctors, the cancer cells in the new place look just like the ones from the breast.

Cancer is always named for the place where it starts. So when breast cancer spreads to the bone (or any other place), it's still called breast cancer. It's not called bone cancer unless it starts from cells in the bone.

Are there different kinds of breast cancer?

There are many [types of breast cancer](#)¹. Some are very rare. Your doctor can tell you more about the type you have. Below are the medical names for the most common types of breast cancer. (Carcinoma is another name for cancer. It's pronounced CAR-sin-**O**-muh.)

- How does the doctor know I have breast cancer?

Tests that may be done

For men, breast cancer is most often found because you have found a lump or other change in your breast.

The doctor asks you questions about your health and does a physical exam. A breast exam is done to look for changes in the nipples or the skin of your breasts. The doctor

- Who will do these tests?
- Where will they be done?
- Who can explain them to me?
- How and when will I get the results?
- Who will explain the results to me?
- What do I need to do next?

beyond the breast. Be sure to ask the doctor about the cancer stage and what it means for you.

Questions to ask the doctor

- Do you know the stage of the cancer?
- If not, how and when will you find out the stage of the cancer?
- Would you explain to me what the stage means in my case?
- Based on the stage of the cancer, how long do you think I'll live?
- What will happen next?

What kind of treatment will I need?

There are many [ways to treat breast cancer](#)⁵, but the main types of treatment are local or systemic.

Surgery and radiation are used to treat only the cancer. They do not affect the rest of the body. This is called *local treatment*.

Chemo and hormone treatment drugs go through the whole body. They can reach cancer cells anywhere in the body. They are called *systemic treatment*.

Doctors often use both local and systemic treatments to treat breast cancer. The treatment plan that's best for you will depend on:

- The stage and grade of the cancer
- The chance that a type of treatment will cure the cancer or help in some way
- Your age
- Other health problems you have
- Your feelings about the treatment and the side effects that come with it

Surgery for breast cancer

Most men with breast cancer have mastectomy, which removes all of the breast tissue on the side that has cancer. Lumpectomy only takes out the lump and a little bit around it. The downside is that you'll most likely need radiation treatment after surgery. But some men who have a mastectomy also need radiation afterward.

Men with breast cancer also often need surgery to take out lymph nodes that might have cancer in the underarm area.

Side effects of surgery

Any type of surgery can have risks and side effects. Be sure to ask the doctor what you can expect. If you have problems, let your doctors know. Doctors who treat men with breast cancer should be able to help you with any problems that come up.

Radiation treatments

Radiation uses high-energy rays (like x-rays) to kill cancer cells. This treatment may be used to kill any cancer cells that may be left in the breast, chest, or arm pit after surgery.

There are 2 main ways radiation can be given. It can be aimed at the breast from a machine outside the body. This is called *external beam radiation*. Or, radioactive seeds can be put right into the breast tissue near the cancer. This is called *brachytherapy* (pronounced BRAKE-ee-THER-uh-pee).

Side effects of radiation treatments

If your doctor suggests radiation treatment, talk about what side effects might happen. Side effects depend on the type of radiation that's used. The most common side effects of radiation are:

- Skin changes where the radiation is given
- Feeling very tired (fatigue)

Most side effects get better after treatment ends. Some might last longer. Talk to your cancer care team about what you can expect.

Chemo

Chemo is the short word for chemotherapy – the use of drugs to fight cancer. The drugs may be given into a vein or taken as pills. These drugs go into the blood and spread through the body. Chemo is given in cycles or rounds. Each round of treatment is followed by a break. Most of the time, 2 or more chemo drugs are given. Treatment often lasts for many months.

Side effects of chemo

Chemo can make you feel very tired, sick to your stomach, and cause your hair to fall out. But these problems go away after treatment ends.

shown not to help. A few have even been found to be harmful. Talk to your doctor about anything you're thinking about using, whether it's a vitamin, a diet, or anything else.

Questions to ask the doctor

- What treatment do you think is best for me?
- What's the goal of this treatment? Do you think it could cure the cancer?
- Will treatment include surgery? If so, who will do the surgery?
- What will the surgery be like?
- Will I need other types of treatment, too?
- What's the goal of these treatments?
- What side effects could I have from these treatments?
- What can I do about side effects that I might have?
- Is there a clinical trial that might be right for me?
- What about special vitamins or diets that friends tell me about? How will I know if they are safe?
- What should I do to be ready for treatment?
- Is there anything I can do to help the treatment work better?
- What's the next step?
- What will happen after treatment?

What will happen after treatment?

You'll be glad [when treatment is over](#)⁸. But it's hard not to worry about cancer coming back. Even when cancer never comes back, people still worry about it. For years after treatment ends, you will see your cancer doctor. Be sure to go to all of these follow-up visits. You will have exams, blood tests, and maybe other tests to see if the cancer has come back.

At first, your visits may be every 3 to 6 months. Then, the longer you're cancer-free, the less often the visits are needed. After 5 years, they may be done once a year.

If you still have a breast (or part of one), you'll still get a mammogram every year.

Having cancer and dealing with treatment can be hard, but it can also be a time to look at your life in new ways. You might be thinking about how to improve your health. Call us or talk to your cancer care team to find out what you can do to feel better.

You can't change the fact that you have cancer. What you can change is how you live the rest of your life – making healthy choices and feeling as well as you can.

For connecting and sharing during a cancer journey

Anyone with cancer, their caregivers, families, and friends, can benefit from help and support. The American Cancer Society offers the Cancer Survivors Network (CSN), a safe place to connect with others who share similar interests and experiences. We also partner with CaringBridge, a free online tool that helps people dealing with illnesses like cancer stay in touch with their friends, family members, and support network by creating their own personal page where they share their journey and health updates.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/breast-cancer-in-men/about/what-is-breast-cancer-in-men.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/breast-cancer-in-men/detection-diagnosis-staging/how-diagnosed.html
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/breast-cancer-in-men/detection-diagnosis-staging/classifying.html
4. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/breast-cancer-in-men/detection-diagnosis-staging/staging.html
5. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/breast-cancer-in-men/treating.html
6. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/making-treatment-decisions/clinical-trials.html
7. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/complementary-and-integrative-medicine.html
8. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/breast-cancer-in-men/after-treatment.html

Words to know

Biopsy (BY-op-see): taking out a small piece of tissue to see if there are cancer cells in it.

Ducts: small tubes that carry milk to the nipple.

DCIS or **ductal carcinoma in situ** (DUCK-tul CAR-sin-**O**-muh in SY-too): cancer that starts in the duct cells but has not grown through the duct walls into other tissue.

Estrogen (ES-tro-jin): the female hormone that a woman's body makes until change of

life. Men make small amounts of this hormone, too.

IBC or inflammatory breast cancer: a rare type of breast cancer; often there's no lump or tumor.

IDC or invasive ductal carcinoma (in-VAY-siv DUCK-tul CAR-sin-O-muh): breast cancer that starts in a duct and grows through the wall of the duct. It can spread to other parts of the body.

ILC or invasive lobular carcinoma (in-VAY-siv LOB-you-lur CAR-sin-O-muh): breast cancer that starts in the milk glands (lobules). It can spread to other parts of the body.

LCIS or lobular carcinoma in situ (LOB-you-lur CAR-sin-O-ma in SY-too): a breast change that starts in the milk glands (lobules) and has not grown through the wall of the lobules; having LCIS increases breast cancer risk.

Lobules (LOB-yules): the glands that make milk.

Lumpectomy (lum-PECK-tuh-me): surgery to remove the breast tumor and a small amount of normal tissue. Also called **breast conservation surgery**.

Mastectomy (mas-TEK-tuh-me): surgery to remove all of the breast and sometimes other tissue.

Metastasis (muh-TAS-tuh-sis): cancer cells that have spread from where they started to other places in the body.

How can I learn more?

We have a lot more information for you about breast cancer, as well as day-to-day help and emotional support every step of the way. Visit www.cancer.org to learn more. Or, you can call our **toll-free number 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 1-800-227-2345** to talk to one of our cancer information specialists.

Last Revised: May 31, 2018

Written by

The American Cancer Society medical and editorial content team

<https://www.cancer.org/cancer/acs-medical-content-and-news-staff.html>

Our team is made up of doctors and oncology certified nurses with deep knowledge of cancer care as well as editors and translators with extensive experience in medical writing.

American Cancer Society medical information is copyrighted material. For reprint requests, please see our Content Usage Policy (www.cancer.org/about-us/policies/content-usage.html).

cancer.org | 1.800.227.2345