



# FRANKLY SPEAKING ABOUT CANCER

## Breast Cancer

*“Take things one step at a time. Try not to be overwhelmed by the tidal wave of technical information coming your way. Finally you know your body best; you have to be your own advocate.”*

— CSC Cancer Experience  
Registry Member, breast cancer

A breast cancer diagnosis is scary. Yet, it is important to understand your diagnosis, possible treatments, and places to go for care. It is important to get answers to your questions. Cancer is serious, but the more you know the more you can manage the impact of this event in your life.

Breast cancer is when malignant (abnormal) cells are found in breast tissue. It is rare in men, but is the second most common form of cancer diagnosed in women. When found early, it may be curable.

Some of the most common breast cancer types are **ductal carcinoma in situ**, the earliest form of breast cancer which starts in a milk duct. **Invasive ductal carcinoma** which also starts in the milk duct, but extends to the surrounding tissue and **invasive lobular carcinoma** which starts in milk-producing glands and also extends to the surrounding tissue.



### Organizations for Breast Cancer Facts, Support & Resources

American Cancer Society	800-227-2345	<a href="http://cancer.org">cancer.org</a>
Cancer Support Community	888-793-9355	<a href="http://cancersupportcommunity.org">cancersupportcommunity.org</a>
Living Beyond Breast Cancer	888-753-5222	<a href="http://lbbc.org">lbbc.org</a>
Look Good Feel Better	800-395-5665	<a href="http://lookgoodfeelbetter.org">lookgoodfeelbetter.org</a>
National Cancer Institute	800-422-6237	<a href="http://cancer.gov">cancer.gov</a>

# ? How is Breast Cancer Diagnosed and Staged?

Breast cancer is diagnosed in stages from 0 through IV. Stage 0-I are the earliest stages, with cancer cells that remain contained within the breast they originated from, up to stage IV (metastatic cancer) which indicates that cancer has spread outside the breast to other parts of the body. Your doctor may use several tests to diagnose and stage your cancer. They include:

- Diagnostic Mammogram
- Ultrasound
- MRI
- Biopsy
- CT scan
- Bone scan
- PET scan
- Genetic tests

## Genetic Tests

These blood tests can identify genes specifically associated with cancer risk such as the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes, and identify if there is an increased risk for additional cancers related to the gene mutation. These tests can help guide treatment and determine if you may benefit from additional screening for other cancers.



## Your Health Care Team

Throughout your treatment, your health care team will include many different people. Key members of your health care team may include:

- Breast or general surgeon, to make initial surgical recommendations, and remove as much of the cancer as possible through surgery
- Medical oncologist to make recommendations about chemotherapy, hormone therapy, targeted therapy, or other treatments, and to treat your cancer with the options available to you
- Oncology nurse to give the treatment(s) prescribed by your medical oncologist. Your oncology nurse is also a resource to help you manage side effects or other issues you may experience
- Radiation oncologist, to treat the cancer with radiation therapy if needed
- Plastic surgeon, to discuss reconstruction options available to you, and perform the technique(s) you choose
- Support team, including nurse navigator, social worker, nutritionist, and others to help you socially, emotionally, and physically during your experience
- Primary care doctor to oversee your regular medical care
- You, your loved ones, and family

## Questions to Ask

- What diagnostic tests will I have?
- What does my diagnosis mean?
- What is the stage of my cancer?
- Who do I talk to about next steps?
- Who do I talk to about support for me and my family?



# Treatment Options

Treatment for breast cancer is different for everyone. Options depend upon the specific type of breast cancer found, your age, overall health and treatment history, whether other organs are affected, the goal(s) of treatment, and the results of all diagnostic tests.

Types of treatment for breast cancer can include:



## Surgery

Surgery is used to remove all known cancer from the breast. The type of surgery that is recommended depends on many factors such as the type of breast cancer, size of the cancer, and size of your breasts. Some surgery options may be a **lumpectomy** (also called a **partial mastectomy** or **breast conserving surgery**) or a **mastectomy**. A lumpectomy removes only the tumor and a small area of surrounding tissue. A mastectomy is the removal of the entire breast. Both of these surgeries may include the removal of lymph nodes.

There are two types of lymph node procedures that may be done with your surgery. One is a **sentinel lymph node biopsy**. This procedure removes a few of the first lymph nodes under the arm and looks to see if there are cancer cells present. Another lymph node procedure is an **axillary lymph node dissection**. This procedure takes more lymph nodes from under the arm and is done to see how much breast cancer is present.



## Radiation Therapy

Radiation therapy uses high energy x-rays to kill cancer cells that may still be present in the breast but are too small to be seen on diagnostic tests. Sometimes radiation may also be used to slow cancer cells from growing or help with pain from cancer if it has spread outside of the breasts. Fatigue and changes in the skin are the most common side effects of radiation therapy.



## Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy uses drugs to stop the ability of a cancer cell to multiply. It may be given through an intravenous (IV) catheter through a vein or as a pill. Chemotherapy works through the entire body and attacks cancer cells, but may also attack normal cells. You can experience side effects from the drug.

*“Ask questions. Get a second opinion. Make sure that you like and have confidence in your doctors.”*

— CSC Cancer Experience Registry  
Member, breast cancer

*“Talk with your doctor to see if you need to make an immediate decision or if there is time to consider your options.”*

— CSC Cancer Experience Registry  
Member, breast cancer



## Hormone Therapy

Some cancers are estrogen and progesterone (ER/PR) positive. This means that these hormones help cancer to grow. Hormone therapies block estrogen and progesterone so that cancer cells cannot use them. There are different types of hormone therapies depending on if you still get a menstrual period. Because these medications can change your hormone levels they may change or stop your period (menstrual cycle) or cause side effects similar to menopause.



## Targeted Therapy

Targeted therapy is a cancer treatment that harms the proteins that help cancer cells grow. These treatments only work on certain types of cancer cells. Special tests will be done to the breast cancer tissue to determine if these treatments might work on your cancer.



## Clinical Trials

Clinical Trials are research studies that test new and promising treatments for breast cancer. Clinical trials may look at new drugs, new doses or schedules of drugs, new ways to manage side effects, or different types of tests to find cancer. There are clinical trials for all different stages of breast cancer. Your health care team can help you find out if there is a clinical trial that may be good for you.

*“Tell your doctor and nurse about your side effects during treatment. They want to know and will treat if necessary.”*

— CSC Cancer Experience Registry Member, breast cancer

## Questions to Ask

- What are the goals for my treatment?
- Which treatment(s) do you recommend and why?
- What kind of side effects might I experience, for how long, and how will they be managed?
- How can I talk to my children/family about my diagnosis?
- What else can I do to stay as healthy as possible?
- Are there other resources available to me both in and outside the hospital?
- If I have questions, who can I call or e-mail?
- What happens after treatment ends?



*“Try to have someone with you when you have cancer-related doctors’ appointments. It is amazing what you hear and someone else hears sitting in the same room. Have pen and paper in hand.”*

— CSC Cancer Experience Registry Member, breast cancer



## You Are Not Alone

People diagnosed with breast cancer often learn the most from others who have had similar experiences. Contact credible organizations that specialize in breast cancer to connect you with people who personally understand.

Social workers and counselors who specialize in breast cancer are available to provide guidance and support. There are places to go for free support groups, education and information.

Many people you know will want to help. Think about the things that each of them can do based on their availability and skills, and let them know what would help. Try to be patient when they cannot help—and seek “backup” support.

### Questions to Ask



- Who can help me with work leave, family care or financial questions?
- Can a website scheduler help? (try [www.mylifeline.org](http://www.mylifeline.org))
- Can a cancer support organization provide me with useful services?
- Do I need emotional support?

*“There’s no right or wrong choices, but don’t do it alone. Reach out in whatever way you’re comfortable - those of us who’ve walked this path want to pay it forward and support others. No one wants cancer for themselves or anyone else, but there’s always hope.”*

— CSC Cancer Experience Registry Member,  
breast cancer



## Maintain Hope

*You may have cancer, but cancer doesn’t have you.*

Many people with cancer find new ways to think about their lives and priorities. You can find things about your experience that are inspiring for you and for those around you.

## VALUABLE RESOURCES

Help is available to you and your loved ones. These resources can help you understand your treatment options, manage side effects, deal with emotions and connect with others affected by breast cancer.

### Cancer Support Community Resources for Support

#### Cancer Support Helpline® 888-793-9355

Our free helpline is open Monday – Friday 9:00 am – 8:00 pm ET. Anyone impacted by cancer can call to talk to a call center counselor. We will connect you with resources, and help you find the right support.

#### OPEN TO OPTIONS®

Do you have questions about your cancer treatment? Open to Options® is a research-proven program that can help you. In less than an hour, our specialists can help you create a list of specific questions about your concerns for your doctor.

#### Affiliate Network

Over 50 locations plus more than 100 satellites around the country offer support groups, educational and healthy lifestyle programs designed for people affected by cancer at no cost.

#### The Living Room, online

Here you will find online support groups, discussion boards and social networking for patients and caregivers.

#### Cancer Experience Registry

Designed to help people impacted by cancer share their story, learn about the experiences of others and help transform the cancer experience. Join today at [CancerExperienceRegistry.org](http://CancerExperienceRegistry.org).

**All of these services are made available with generous contributions from CSC supporters. To access these services above, visit [cancersupportcommunity.org](http://cancersupportcommunity.org) or call 1-888-793-9355.**

### Breast Cancer Specific Information & Support

Breastcancer.org	610-642-6550	breastcancer.org
Facing Our Risk Empowered (FORCE)	866-288-7475	facingourrisk.org
Living Beyond Breast Cancer	888-753-5222	lbcc.org
Look Good Feel Better (American Cancer Society Program)	800-395-5665	lookgoodfeelbetter.org
National Cancer Institute	800-422-6237	cancer.gov
Nueva Vida	866-986-8432	nueva-vida.org
Sister's Network	866-781-1808	sistersnetworkinc.org
Young Survival Coalition	877-972-1011	youngsurvival.org

### Help with Financial and Legal Concerns

Patient Advocate Foundation	800-532-5274	patientadvocate.org
Partnership for Prescription Assistance	877-477-2669	pparx.org

### Finding Clinical Trials

BreastCancerTrials.org	415-476-5777	breastcancertrials.org
Cancer Support Community's Emerging Med Search	800-814-8927	cancersupportcommunity.org
National Cancer Institute	888-422-6237	cancer.gov/clinicaltrials



The Cancer Support Community provides this information as a service. This publication is not intended to take the place of medical care or the advice of your doctor. Talk to your doctor or nurse to learn more. Thank you to members of CSC's Cancer Experience Registry who participated in a survey to inform the development of this fact sheet.

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