



What is breast cancer?

Breast cancer occurs when abnormal cells in the breast grow in an uncontrolled way.

Breasts are made up of lobules and ducts surrounded by fatty and connective tissue. Lobules produce breast milk and ducts carry milk to the nipple.¹

What are the different types of breast cancer?

There are several different types of breast cancer.

- ▶ Ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS) and lobular carcinoma in situ (LCIS) are non-invasive breast cancers that are confined to the ducts or lobules of the breast.¹
- ▶ Invasive ductal or lobular carcinoma is an invasive breast cancer that starts in the ducts or lobules of the breast and can spread into the breast tissue.¹ Invasive breast cancer may be confined to the breast and lymph nodes in the armpit (early breast cancer) or may have spread outside the breast to other parts of the body (secondary breast cancer).^{1,2}
- ▶ Paget's disease of the nipple is a rare form of breast cancer that affects the nipple and the area around the nipple (the areola) and is commonly associated with an invasive cancer elsewhere in the breast.¹
- ▶ Inflammatory breast cancer is a rare form of invasive breast cancer that affects the lymphatic vessels in the skin of the breast, causing the breast to become red and inflamed.¹

What are the symptoms of breast cancer?

The symptoms of breast cancer depend on where the tumour is in the breast, the size of the tumour and how quickly it is growing.¹

Breast changes that may indicate breast cancer include:

- ▶ a new lump or lumpiness, especially if it's only in one breast³
- ▶ a change in the size or shape of the breast³
- ▶ a change to the nipple, such as crusting, ulcer, redness or inversion³
- ▶ a nipple discharge that occurs without squeezing³
- ▶ a change in the skin of the breast such as redness or dimpling³
- ▶ an unusual pain that doesn't go away.³

There are a number of conditions that may cause these symptoms, not just breast cancer. If any of these symptoms are experienced, it is important that they are discussed with a doctor.

What are the risk factors for breast cancer?

A risk factor is any factor that is associated with an increased chance of developing a particular health condition, such as breast cancer. There are different types of risk factors, some of which can be modified and some which cannot.

It should be noted that having one or more risk factors does not mean a person will develop breast cancer. Many people have at least one risk factor but will never develop breast cancer, while others with breast cancer may have had no known risk factors. Even if a person with breast cancer has a risk factor, it is usually hard to know how much that risk factor contributed to the development of their disease.



While the causes of breast cancer are not fully understood, there are a number of factors associated with the risk of developing the disease. Some of the risk factors for breast cancer include:

- ▶ being a woman¹
- ▶ increasing age¹
- ▶ having a strong family history of breast cancer¹
- ▶ having a breast condition such as a personal history of breast cancer, DCIS or LCIS
- ▶ a number of hormonal factors, child-bearing history, personal and lifestyle factors.⁴

How is breast cancer diagnosed?

Diagnosis of breast cancer involves the triple test. This includes:

- ▶ a clinical breast examination¹
- ▶ imaging tests – which may include a mammogram or ultrasound
- ▶ taking a sample of tissue (biopsy) from the breast for examination under a microscope.¹

Other tests, such as blood tests or bone scans, may be done if symptoms suggest that breast cancer has spread outside the breast.^{1,2} Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) may be suggested to assess extent of disease in some cases.

Treatment options

Treatment and care of people with cancer is usually provided by a team of health professionals – called a multidisciplinary team.

Treatment for breast cancer depends on the stage and type of the disease, the severity of symptoms and the person's general health. Treatment usually involves surgery to remove part or all of the affected breast, and removal of one or more lymph nodes from the armpit. Breast reconstruction may be available for women who have the whole breast removed (mastectomy). Radiotherapy, chemotherapy, hormonal therapies, and/or targeted therapies, may also be used.¹

Research is ongoing to find new ways to diagnose and treat different types of cancer. Some people may be offered the option of participation in a clinical trial to test new ways of treating breast cancer.

Finding support

People often feel overwhelmed, scared, anxious and upset after a diagnosis of cancer. These are all normal feelings.

Having practical and emotional support during and after diagnosis and treatment for cancer is very important. Support may be available from family and friends, health professionals or special support services.

In addition, State and Territory Cancer Councils provide general information about cancer as well as information on local resources and relevant support groups. The Cancer Council Helpline can be accessed from anywhere in Australia by calling **13 11 20** for the cost of a local call.

More information about finding support can be found on the Cancer Australia website www.canceraustralia.gov.au or Breast Cancer Network Australia www.bcna.org.au

References

1. Cancer Australia. Guide for women with early breast cancer. Cancer Australia, Surry Hills, NSW, 2012.
2. National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre. Guide for women with secondary breast cancer. National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre, Surry Hills, NSW, 2010.
3. Cancer Australia. Breast changes. <http://canceraustralia.nbcc.org.au/breast-cancer/awareness/breast-changes> [Accessed July 2012].
4. Cancer Australia. Breast cancer risk. <http://canceraustralia.nbcc.org.au/breast-cancer/about-breast-cancer/breast-cancer-risk> [Accessed July 2012].

