

Male Breast Cancer

What is male breast cancer?

Breast cancer is a disease in which cancer cells form in the tissues of the breast. Breast cancer can strike men at any age, but it is most common in men between 60 and 70 years of age. Male breast cancer makes up less than 1 percent of all breast cancer cases. Doctors diagnose about 1,500 new cases in the U.S. every year.

What are the types of breast cancer?

The types of breast cancer are:

- **Infiltrating ductal carcinoma:** This cancer spreads beyond the breast ducts. Most men with breast cancer have this type of cancer.
- **Ductal carcinoma in situ:** These cancer cells are found in the lining of a duct. This type is also called intraductal carcinoma.
- **Inflammatory breast cancer:** With this type of cancer, the breast looks red and swollen, and it feels warm.
- **Paget's disease of the nipple:** This type grows from the breast ducts beneath the nipple onto the surface of the nipple.

What are the risk factors for breast cancer?

Anything that increases your chance of getting a disease is called a risk factor. The risk factors for male cancer are:

- Age: Most men get the disease between the ages of 65 and 70
- Exposure of the breast to radiation
- Having a condition that lowers testicular function, such as:
 - Inflammation of, or injury to, testes
 - Undescended testes
 - Gynecomastia (abnormal enlargement of the breast in men)
- Having a disease related to high levels of estrogen in the body, such as cirrhosis (liver disease) or Klinefelter's syndrome (a genetic disorder)
- Having several female relatives who have had breast cancer, especially relatives who have an alteration in the BRCA2 mutation

How do doctors diagnose breast cancer in men?

Typically, men with breast cancer have lumps that can be felt. Doctors also do biopsies to detect cancer. A biopsy is the removal of tissue or fluid. The types of biopsies are:

- **Needle biopsy:** The doctor uses a thin needle to remove part of a lump, tissue or fluid. This procedure is also called a fine-needle aspiration biopsy.
- **Core biopsy:** The doctor uses a wide needle to remove part of a lump or tissue.
- **Excisional biopsy:** The doctor removes an entire lump or tissue.

After the tissue or fluid is removed, a doctor in a lab tests it for cancer.

Is survival for men with breast cancer similar to the survival for woman with breast cancer?

Yes, survival for men is similar to women when the stage (extent of the cancer in the body) at diagnosis is the same. Breast cancer in men, however, is often diagnosed in a later stage.

What are the stages of male breast cancer?

Tests reveal if the cancer has spread within the breast or to other parts of the body. This process is called staging - when the doctor decides the stage of the disease. Knowing the stage is important to plan treatment. The stages of breast cancer are:

Stage 0 (carcinoma in situ)

In Stage 0, abnormal cells are in the breast, but they have not spread to surrounding tissue. This is called carcinoma in situ. The two types of breast carcinoma in situ are:

- Ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS) is a noninvasive, precancerous condition in which abnormal cells are found in the lining of a breast duct. The cells have not spread outside the duct to the other tissues in the breast. In some cases, DCIS may become invasive cancer and spread to other tissues, although it is not known how to predict which lesions will become invasive.
- Lobular carcinoma in situ (LCIS) is a condition in which abnormal cells are found in the lobules of the breast. This condition seldom becomes invasive cancer and is rare in men.

Stage I

In Stage I, the tumor is 2 centimeters or smaller, and has not spread outside the breast.

Stage IIA

In Stage IIA

- No tumor is found in the breast, but cancer is found in the axillary lymph nodes (the lymph nodes under the arm); or
- The tumor is 2 centimeters or smaller and has spread to the axillary lymph nodes; or
- The tumor is between 2 and 5 centimeters but has not spread to the axillary lymph nodes.

Stage IIB

In Stage IIB, the tumor is either:

- Between 2 and 5 centimeters and has spread to the axillary lymph nodes (the lymph nodes under the arm); or
- Larger than 5 centimeters but has not spread to the axillary lymph nodes.

Stage IIIA

In Stage IIIA:

- No tumor is found in the breast, but cancer is found in axillary lymph (the lymph nodes under the arm) nodes that are attached to each other or to other structures; or
- The tumor is 5 centimeters or smaller and has spread to axillary lymph nodes that are attached to each other or to other structures; or
- The tumor is larger than 5 centimeters and has spread to axillary lymph nodes that may be attached to each other or to other structures.

Stage IIIB

In stage IIIB, the cancer may be any size and:

- Has spread to tissues near the breast (the skin or chest wall, including the ribs and muscles in the chest); and
- May have spread to lymph nodes within the breast or under the arm

Stage IIIC

In Stage IIIC, the cancer:

- Has spread to lymph nodes beneath the collarbone and near the neck; and
- May have spread to lymph nodes within the breast or under the arm to tissues near the breast

Stage IV

In Stage IV, the cancer has spread to other organs of the body, most often the bones, lungs, liver or brain.

How is breast cancer treated?

Four types of standard treatment:

- Surgery to remove the cancer
- Chemotherapy (using drugs to kill cancer cells)
- Hormone treatment (using hormones to stop the cells from growing)
- Radiation treatment (using high-dose X-rays to kill cancer cells)

How is breast cancer treated by stage?

Stage 0 or Stage I

Most men in this group need surgery to remove the breast cancer. Doctors usually do a mastectomy, removal of the whole breast. Doctors will also, if needed, remove lymph nodes under the arm.

Lumpectomy or other breast-conserving procedures can sometimes be performed in men with breast cancer. If breast-conserving procedures are done, they should be followed by radiation.

Some men with stage 1 breast cancer may need chemotherapy or tamoxifen, depending on the size of the cancer and the lab test results. This is used for tumors larger than 1 centimeter or with high growth rates.

Stage II

The options for surgery and radiation treatment are the same as with stage 1 cancers. If the lymph nodes have cancer cells, then the hormone treatment, chemotherapy or radiation may be needed

Hormone treatment is suggested for all cancer that has spread to the lymph nodes and estrogen-receptor-positive tumors. Most men also usually need chemotherapy, but this depends on a man's age and overall health. Older men, particularly those in poor health, are less likely to have it.

Men may also need radiation if several lymph nodes are involved. Radiation treatment reduces the chance that the cancer will come back, and it may increase the chance for cure.

Stage III

Stage III is treated with chemotherapy and surgery, followed by tamoxifen (if the tumor is estrogen or progesterone receptor positive). In addition, most doctors suggest radiation treatment to the chest wall.

Stage IV

Main treatment for stage IV is chemotherapy, hormone treatment or both.

Radiation and surgery also treat certain symptoms. This depends on where the cancer has spread. For example, radiation treatment may help pain from cancer spreading to the bone. Also, drugs called biphosphonates can help prevent bone damage caused by cancer that has spread.

Can male breast cancer recur?

Recurrent disease means that the cancer has come back after treatment. It may come back in the breast, in the soft tissues of the chest (the chest wall) or in another part of the body.

If the cancer comes back in the breast or chest wall, and has not spread to the other areas of the body, cure is still possible. Doctors suggest surgery, followed by radiation treatment. If the area has already received radiation, it may not be possible to have more. If the cancer comes back in a distant part of the body, it is treated the same as Stage IV disease.

Where can I find more information about male breast cancer?

Books available at library or book store:

- “Saving Jack: A Man’s Struggle With Breast Cancer,” by Jack Willis
- “A Warrior’s Way,” by John R. Cope
- Diseases of the Breast,” 4th ed, by Harris Lippman, Morrow and Osborne

American Cancer Society

800-227-2345

www.cancer.org

Across the United States, this voluntary organization offers free booklets, support groups, and programs like Reach to Recovery

National Cancer Institute’s Cancer Information Service (CIS)

800-422-6237

www.cancer.gov

Supported by the National Cancer Institute, this free telephone service provides current information on cancer prevention, detection, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation. CIS also makes referrals for counseling, home care services, and hospice and screening programs. Bilingual counselors are on duty to help Spanish-speaking callers.

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