



Breast Cancer Awareness

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Awareness and knowledge a friend when fighting breast cancer

When diagnosed with breast cancer, women are often filled with questions. What is the survival rate? Can breast cancer spread to other parts of my body? What does this mean for my family?

Such questions are common, and it's perfectly alright and even beneficial for women diagnosed with breast cancer to ask as many questions as possible to better understand the disease. Though each individual's experience with breast cancer is unique, upon diagnosis the doctor will determine which stage that cancer is in. Determining the stage of the cancer is based on:

- the size of the cancer
- if the cancer is invasive or noninvasive
- whether or not the cancer is in the lymph nodes
- if the cancer has spread to other parts of the body

Upon diagnosis, the doctor will also discuss if the cancer is local, regional or distant. Local means the cancer is confined to the breast, while regional means the cancer has spread to the lymph nodes, most likely those in the armpit. If the doctor says the cancer is distant, that means it has been found in other parts of the body. If the tumors involve the breast skin, the underlying chest structures, have changed the breast's shape, and enlarged the lymph nodes, the doctor will then likely determine the cancer is locally advanced or regionally advanced.

Survival rates have increased dramatically over the last 30 years. Much of this is thanks to research, but increased awareness of breast cancer has also played a role in the significantly improved survival rates. Part of that awareness includes taking steps as a young woman to reduce risk for breast cancer. Steps such as adopting a healthier diet, learning about family history with breast cancer and undergoing routine checkups can greatly improve a woman's chances of beating breast cancer. Survival rates depend on a host of factors, including the stage of the cancer at diagnosis. Women who understand the stages of breast cancer and the role they play in surviving the disease might be more

inclined to take steps that reduce their risk.

• **Stage 0:** Though the best breast cancer diagnosis is no diagnosis at all, women diagnosed with stage 0 breast cancer can breathe somewhat easy. Stage 0 means the cancer is noninvasive and there is no evidence that the cancer cells or the noncancerous abnormal cells have spread beyond the part of the breast where they originated.

• **Stage I:** A stage 1 diagnosis means the cancer is invasive, and the cancer cells are beginning to invade normal cells around the breast tissue. However, a stage 1 diagnosis means the lymph nodes have not been invaded.

• **Stage II:** Stage II is divided into the subcategories of IIA or IIB. A stage IIA diagnosis can mean any of the following:

- no tumor has been found in the breast, but cancer cells are in the lymph nodes under the arm; or
- the tumor in the breast is 2 cm or smaller and has spread to the lymph nodes under the arm; or
- the tumor in the breast is between 2 to 5 cm but has not spread to the lymph nodes under the arm.

A stage IIB diagnosis means the cancer is invasive and:

- the tumor is between 2 to 5 cm and has spread to the lymph nodes under the arm; or
- the tumor is larger than 5 cm but has not spread to the lymph nodes under the arm

• **Stage III:** Similar to stage II, a stage III diagnosis will be divided into subcategories. But stage III breast cancer will be diagnosed as IIIA, IIIB or IIIC. In stage IIIA breast cancer:

- no tumor is found, but cancer has been found in the lymph nodes under the arm; these lymph nodes will be clumped together or sticking to other structures or the cancer may have spread to lymph nodes near the breastbone; or
- the cancer is any size and has to spread to the lymph nodes under the arm, which are clumped together and sticking to other structures

A stage IIIB diagnosis means:

- the cancer may be any size and has spread to the skin of breast and/or the chest wall; and
- the cancer may have spread to the lymph nodes under the arm, where they will be clumped together or sticking to other structures; or the cancer may have spread to the lymph nodes near the breastbone.

Symptoms of stage IIIB breast cancer can include reddening of a significant portion of the breast skin, swelling of the breast and a warm feeling at the touch.

A stage IIIC diagnosis means:

- there may be no sign of cancer in the breast
- if there is a tumor, it can be any size and may have spread to the chest wall and/or the skin of the breast; and
- the cancer has spread to the lymph nodes above or below the collarbone; and
- the cancer may have spread to the lymph nodes under the arm or near the breastbone.

• **Stage IV:** A stage IV diagnosis means the cancer has spread beyond the breast and local lymph nodes to other organs of the body. This can include the skin, bones, liver, lungs, distant lymph nodes, or even the brain.

A stage IV diagnosis might be a recurrence of a previous breast cancer, but it's also possible to get a stage IV diagnosis at first diagnosis.

More information is available at www.nationalbreastcancer.org.

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Family history increases risk for breast cancer

Millions of people across the globe will be diagnosed with breast cancer this year. In fact, only certain skin cancers affect more women than breast cancer within the United States and Canada.

The World Cancer Research Fund International says breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in women across the globe. Belgium, The Netherlands and Luxembourg had the highest number of breast cancer cases in 2020, while Barbados and Fiji had the greatest number of deaths attributed to the disease. Some

of these high case numbers may be attributed to women with family histories of breast cancer — something that increases risk significantly.

BreastCancer.org indicates that women with close relatives who have had breast cancer, such as sisters, mothers or grandmothers, are at considerably higher risk of developing breast cancer themselves. Also, breast cancer may occur at a younger age in women with family histories of the disease.

Understanding breast cancer risk is vital for women's health. The following break-

down, courtesy of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, can help women from all backgrounds understand their risk for breast cancer.

- **Average risk:** No first- or second-degree relatives with breast or ovarian cancer, or one second-degree female relative with breast cancer (in one breast only) diagnosed after age 50.

- **Moderate risk:** This is a somewhat higher risk that may not turn into breast cancer. It occurs when there is one or two first-degree or two second-degree female rela-

tives with breast cancer (in one breast only), with both relatives diagnosed after age 50; otherwise, one or two first- or second-degree relatives with high grade prostate cancer.

- **Strong:** Women with strong risks have much higher chances of developing breast cancer than the general population. Conditions like having one or more first- or second-degree relatives with breast cancer diagnosed at age 45 or younger, triple negative breast cancer, primary cancer of both breasts, and both breast and ovarian cancer in

the same relative are warning signs of increased risk.

It's important for women with increased risk for breast cancer due to family history to discuss options with their doctors. More frequent mammograms and other screening tests may be recommended, and screening at younger ages than the standard age also may be considered. Women who are at high risk may be urged to undergo genetic counseling and testing for hereditary breast and ovarian cancer markers.

Breast cancer can

be an especially scary prospect for women with family histories of the disease. By familiarizing themselves with their risks for breast cancer, women can take the necessary steps to protect their long-term health.



Pink Is for Powerful

Recognizing and remembering the strength, courage and experience of every breast cancer fighter and survivor.



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