

## What is metastatic breast cancer?

Metastatic breast cancer is breast cancer that has spread (metastasized) beyond the breast and nearby lymph nodes to other parts of the body. Metastatic breast cancer isn't a type of breast cancer. It's the most advanced stage of breast cancer, also known as stage IV.

Many people in the U.S. and around the world are living with metastatic breast cancer. Most cases of metastatic breast cancer occur after treatment for early-stage breast cancer. This can happen years after treatment for early breast cancer. It's unclear what causes some cancers to spread.

## Who gets metastatic breast cancer?

About 6 percent of women and 9 percent of men have metastatic breast cancer when they are first diagnosed. It is estimated that more than 168,000 women are living with metastatic breast cancer in the U.S. Black and African American and Hispanic/Latina women are more likely to be diagnosed with breast cancer at later stages, including metastatic breast cancer.

If you have metastatic breast cancer, it's not your fault. You did nothing to cause it.

## Common Sites of Metastatic Breast Cancer

- Bone
- Brain
- Liver
- Lungs

Although metastatic breast cancer has spread to another part of the body, it's still breast cancer and treated as breast cancer. For example, breast cancer that has spread to the bone is metastatic breast cancer in the bone (not bone cancer) and is treated with breast cancer drugs. It may also be referred to as bone metastases.



## Signs & Symptoms of Metastatic Breast Cancer

Metastasis is most often found when people report signs or symptoms. These may include:

- Shortness of breath
- Chronic persistent cough
- Weight loss
- Bone pain
- Seizures
- Yellowing of the skin or the whites of the eyes

Don't panic if you have one of these signs or symptoms. Most often, they don't mean the breast cancer has spread. However, discuss any of these signs or symptoms with your doctor if they last for more than 2 weeks.

## Follow-up Tests

Based on your signs and symptoms, the following tests may be done.

- Blood tests (including with tumor marker tests)
- Imaging tests (bone scans, CT scan, PET scan, chest x-ray)
- Biopsy to check suspicious areas

# Metastatic Breast Cancer: WHAT IS IT?

## Resources

**Susan G. Komen®**  
1-877 GO KOMEN  
(1-877-465-6636)  
komen.org

### Metastatic Breast Cancer Impact Series

Attend Susan G. Komen's MBC Impact Series, a free monthly educational event series for people living with metastatic breast cancer and their loved ones.  
komenmbc.vfairs.com

## Related online resources:

- [komen.org/MBCResources](https://www.komen.org/MBCResources)
- [komen.org/SurvivorshipResources](https://www.komen.org/SurvivorshipResources)
- [Breast Cancer Recurrence](#)
- [Metastatic Breast Cancer: Treatment Overview](#)
- [Metastatic Breast Cancer: Quality of Life](#)
- [After Early Breast Cancer – Signs and Symptoms of Metastatic Breast Cancer](#)
- [Metastatic Breast Cancer: Bone Protection](#)
- [End-of-Life Care](#)
- [Metastatic Breast Cancer: Questions to Ask the Doctor](#)

## Diagnosis

A metastatic breast cancer diagnosis is devastating. You're processing a lot of information and dealing with many emotions. You may have been diagnosed with breast cancer many years ago or perhaps just recently completed treatment for early breast cancer. For some, this is your first breast cancer diagnosis, which is especially shocking. No matter your situation, you may be overwhelmed and scared.

Take time to process the information from your doctor. You may want to [get a second opinion](#). This can give you a different insight into your diagnosis and treatment options or it may confirm what you've already heard.

Also, if you're not happy with the care you're getting or you're not connecting with your doctor, another doctor may be better suited for you.

## Treatment goals

Metastatic breast cancer can't be cured today, but it can be treated. Treatment focuses on extending life and maintaining [quality of life](#).

Treatment for metastatic breast cancer is highly personalized. Together with your doctor, you can find the right balance of treatment to control the cancer and maintain quality of life. Your treatment plan is guided by factors, such as:

- The tumor type or [biology of the tumor](#) (such as hormone receptor status and HER2 status)
- Whether you have a [BRCA1](#) or [BRCA2](#) inherited gene mutation
- Where the cancer has spread
- Symptoms
- Past breast cancer treatments
- Your goals
- Your overall health



Talk with your doctor about your treatment options.

- What do they suggest and why?
- What are the side effects of each treatment?

## Prognosis

Modern treatments continue to improve survival. However, survival for metastatic breast cancer varies greatly from person to person.

## Getting support

It's normal to feel angry, sad, shocked, anxious and overwhelmed. You don't have to face this alone. Support from family, friends and others may improve your emotional well-being and quality of life.

You can also get more formal support like counseling in a one-on-one or group setting. This may help you:

- Manage feelings of sadness or anxiety
- Identify symptoms that can be treated by your health care team
- Improve communication with your family and loved ones
- Reduce feelings of being alone
- Discuss fears about death and dying
- Express your needs and preferences

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