

## Types of breast cancer recurrence

- Local recurrence is breast cancer found in the chest wall or the lymph nodes in the underarm area.
- Distant recurrence (called metastasis) is breast cancer that has spread to other parts of the body. It's also called stage IV or metastatic breast cancer.

The risk of either type varies from person to person. It also depends on the first breast cancer diagnosis and treatment.

Many people say facing breast cancer the first time around was one of the hardest things they've ever done. There were new words to learn and many tests and treatments to go through. When breast cancer comes back (after treatment), it's called a recurrence. You might know what to expect, but that doesn't mean it's easy. It's normal to feel angry and afraid.

Most people will never have a recurrence. If you do though, it's not your fault. You did nothing to cause it. Everyone who's had breast cancer is at risk.

After breast cancer treatment, see your doctor for regular follow-up visits to manage side effects of treatment. Discuss any signs of possible local recurrence or metastasis.

You may also wonder if you have the strength to go through it all again. If you've had these thoughts, you're not alone. Try not to lose hope. You and your doctor will make a plan to treat the cancer.

While it may be hard, try to do things that make you happy. Talk to others about how they can help. Find a support group. Studies show support can help reduce anxiety and stress, depression, fatigue and even the feeling of pain.

## How is a recurrence found?

- Local recurrence is usually found during a mammogram or a physical exam, or when you notice a change.
- Metastasis is usually found when signs or symptoms are noticed and reported to your doctor. If you notice any change that persists for 2 weeks or longer – tell your doctor right away.
- Most common symptoms are:
  - Shortness of breath,
  - Bone pain,
  - Weight loss,
  - Seizures and/or
  - Yellowing of the skin or whites of the eyes (jaundice).

Your breast cancer is less likely to recur if:

- You had no or few cancerous lymph nodes found during surgery.
- Your breast cancer was found early and was small.



For more information, visit [komen.org](http://komen.org) or call Susan G. Komen's breast care helpline at 1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636) Monday through Friday, 9 AM to 10 PM ET.

## Resources

### Susan G. Komen®

1-877 GO KOMEN  
(1-877-465-6636)  
[komen.org](http://komen.org)

### American Cancer Society

1-800-ACS-2345  
[cancer.org](http://cancer.org)

### National Cancer Institute

1-800-4-CANCER  
(1-800-422-6237)  
[cancer.gov](http://cancer.gov)

## Related education resources:

- [End-of-life Care](#)
- [Metastatic Breast Cancer](#)
- [After Early Breast Cancer - Signs and Symptoms of Metastatic Breast Cancer](#)
- [Support After A Breast Cancer Diagnosis](#)

## A new treatment plan

### LEARN AS MUCH AS YOU CAN

Find out as much as you can about your breast cancer. The location and features of the tumor may be different from your first breast cancer. This will help guide your treatment options.

### DON'T FACE THIS ALONE

There may be hard choices to make. A family member or friend can help you weigh your options. Ask them to take notes at doctor appointments, gather paperwork and talk through your treatment options.

### PICK YOUR MEDICAL TEAM

You may want to use the same medical team you had before. However, it's always OK to get a second opinion. Another doctor may have a different insight about your diagnosis and treatment options. By getting a second opinion you may have more options for care. Or, you may find a doctor you relate to better.

### DECIDE YOUR TREATMENT GOALS

The location and extent of the recurrence will affect your treatment goals. If you have a local recurrence, your treatment will aim to get rid of the cancer with some combination of

- surgery,
- chemotherapy,
- hormone therapy,
- HER2-targeted therapy and/or
- radiation therapy (if it wasn't part of your initial treatment).

If you have metastatic breast cancer, tests will be done to see which organs are involved and to learn more about the tumor. This will inform your treatment options. Talk with your doctor about treatment goals and options.

### SECOND PRIMARY TUMOR

A second primary breast tumor is a **new** breast cancer. It's not related to your first breast cancer. It's not a recurrence. It forms in a different spot from the original breast cancer, such as the opposite breast. It may have different tumor features.

## You're not alone

If you're facing a breast cancer recurrence, you're not alone. Many people have been where you are today. You can find more information on finding a support group [here](#).

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