

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 (stage 4).

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?

It's estimated there were more than 168,000 women living with metastatic breast cancer in the U.S. in 2020 (most recent data available). Black women are more likely than white women to be diagnosed with breast cancer at later stages, including metastatic breast cancer. About 6% of women and 9% of men have metastatic breast cancer when they are first diagnosed. This is called de novo 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.
- Lungs.
- Liver.
- Brain.

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 bones is metastatic breast cancer in the bones (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:

- Fatigue.
- 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 signs or symptoms, such as fatigue or weight change. 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, follow-up tests may include:

- Blood tests, including tumor marker tests.
- Imaging tests, such as bone scans, CT scans, PET scans and chest X-rays.
- A biopsy to check suspicious areas.

This fact sheet is intended to be a brief overview. For more information, visit [komen.org](https://www.komen.org) or call the Komen Patient Care Center's Breast Care Helpline at 1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636) Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. ET and Friday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. ET or email at helpline@komen.org. Se habla español.

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 [Komen's MBC Impact Series](#), a free educational event series for people living with metastatic breast cancer and their loved ones.

Komen Metastatic Breast Cancer (Stage IV) Group

The [Facebook group](#) provides a place where those living with metastatic breast cancer, and those who love them, can find support, friendship and information. Click the link above or visit Facebook and search for Komen Metastatic Breast Cancer (Stage IV) Group and request to join.

Related online resources:

- [komen.org/MBCResources](#)
- [After Early Breast Cancer – Signs and Symptoms of Metastatic Breast Cancer](#)
- [Metastatic Breast Cancer: Treatment Overview](#)
- [Metastatic Breast Cancer: HER2-Targeted Therapies](#)
- [Metastatic Breast Cancer: Quality of Life](#)
- [Metastatic Breast Cancer: Bone Protection](#)
- [Metastatic Breast Cancer: 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 just recently completed treatment for early breast cancer. For some, this is your first breast cancer diagnosis, which is even more shocking. In any case, 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 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 [biology of the tumor](#), including hormone receptor status and HER2 status.
- Where the cancer has spread.
- Your symptoms.
- Your past breast cancer treatments.
- Whether you have a [BRCA1](#) or [BRCA2](#) inherited gene mutation.
- Your overall health.
- Your goals and preferences.



Talk with your doctor about your treatment options.

- What treatments do they recommend 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.

This content provided by Susan G. Komen® is designed for educational purposes only and is not exhaustive. Please consult with your personal physician.