

# Patient information from BMJ

Last published: Dec 20, 2023

## Breast cancer: questions to ask your doctor

**If you've been diagnosed with breast cancer you may want to talk to your doctor to find out more.**

Here are some questions you might want to ask, depending on your own situation.

- Has my breast cancer spread outside my breast? What stage is my cancer?
- How big is my tumour?
- Can I have surgery that removes only the lump (breast-conserving surgery) and not the whole breast (mastectomy)?
- Did my breast cancer happen because of genes I have inherited?
- What will you do to find out if my breast cancer has spread to the lymph nodes in my armpit and to other nodes?
- What treatment will I need after surgery?
- What side effects can I expect from surgery and other treatments?
- Is my breast cancer affected by the hormone oestrogen (is it oestrogen-receptor positive)? (This can affect how your cancer might be treated and how it may respond to the treatments.)
- Do I have HER-2 positive breast cancer (this means the cancer cells make too much of a protein called HER-2)? (This can also affect your treatment.)
- Will my surgery be done by a specialist breast surgeon? (This can be a difficult question to ask, but research suggests there is improved success when your surgeon is more experienced in carrying out the specific breast cancer surgery you are having.)
- Do any of my lymph nodes have cancer cells in them? If so, how many?
- How abnormal do the cancer cells look under a microscope? (This can tell you how likely it is that your tumour will spread and what kind of treatment you need.)
- Will I need chemotherapy after surgery? If so, what type and for how long?
- Will I need radiotherapy? If so, for how long?

## Breast cancer: questions to ask your doctor

- Will I need hormone therapy? If so, what type and for how long?
- If I have a mastectomy, should I have breast-reconstruction surgery? If so, when should it be done and what sort of surgeon should do it?
- Are other people in my family more likely to get breast cancer? Should they have check-ups more often?
- Is there anything I can do at home (for example, changes to my diet or exercise) to improve the chances of my treatment being successful?
- Will having breast cancer, or receiving treatment for breast cancer, affect any future pregnancies? Would I still be able to breastfeed?

The patient information from *BMJ Best Practice* is regularly updated. The most recent version of Best Practice can be found at [bestpractice.bmj.com](https://bestpractice.bmj.com). This information is intended for use by health professionals. It is not a substitute for medical advice. It is strongly recommended that you independently verify any interpretation of this material and, if you have a medical problem, see your doctor.

Please see BMJ's full terms of use at: [bmj.com/company/legal-information](https://bmj.com/company/legal-information). BMJ does not make any representations, conditions, warranties or guarantees, whether express or implied, that this material is accurate, complete, up-to-date or fit for any particular purposes.

© BMJ Publishing Group Ltd 2024. All rights reserved.

### What did you think about this patient information guide?

Complete the [online survey](#) or scan the QR code to help us to ensure our content is of the highest quality and relevant for patients. The survey is anonymous and will take around 5 minutes to complete.



**BMJ** Group