

Metastatic Breast Cancer: **WHAT IS IT?**

What is metastatic breast cancer?

Metastatic breast cancer (MBC) is breast cancer that has spread (metastasized) beyond the breast and nearby **lymph nodes** to other parts of the body. MBC isn't a type of breast cancer. It's the most advanced stage of breast cancer, also known as stage 4 (stage IV).

Who gets MBC?

Many people in the U.S. and around the world are living with MBC. It's estimated there are about 170,000 women living with MBC in the U.S. Black women are more likely than white women to be diagnosed with breast cancer at later stages, including MBC. Men can also get MBC.

About 6% of women and 10% of men have MBC when they are first diagnosed (their initial diagnosis). This is called *de novo* MBC. Most cases of MBC 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.

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

What are the common sites of MBC?

- Bone.
- Lungs.
- Liver.
- Brain.

Although the metastatic breast cancer cells have spread to another part of the body, it's still considered and treated as breast cancer. For example, breast cancer that has spread to the bones is MBC in the bones (or bone metastases) and is treated with breast cancer drugs. It is not bone cancer.



What are some signs and symptoms of metastasis?

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

- Fatigue.
- Shortness of breath.
- Weight loss.
- Bone pain.
- Seizures.
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin or the whites of the eyes).

Try not to 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.

What tests are used to find MBC?

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 tissue **biopsy** to check suspicious areas.

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Resources

Susan G. Komen®

1-877 GO KOMEN
(1-877-465-6636)
komen.org

MBC Impact Series

Attend Komen's MBC Impact Series, a free educational event series for people living with MBC and their loved ones.

Komen MBC (Stage IV) Group

The Facebook group provides a place where those living with MBC, and those who love them, can find support, friendship and information. Click the link above or visit Facebook and search for Komen MBC (Stage IV) Group and request to join.

Related online resources:

- komen.org/MBCResources
- [After Early Breast Cancer – Signs and Symptoms of MBC](#)
- [MBC: Treatment Overview](#)
- [MBC: HER2-Targeted Therapies](#)
- [MBC: Quality of Life](#)
- [MBC: Bone Metastases](#)
- [MBC: End-of-Life Care](#)
- [MBC: Questions to Ask the Doctor](#)

I was diagnosed with MBC, now what?

An MBC 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. No matter your situation, you may be overwhelmed and scared. This is normal.

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.

What are the goals of treatment?

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

Treatment for MBC is highly personalized. Together with your doctor, you can find the right balance of treatment to control the cancer and maintain your 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 there are gene mutations in the tumor (such as [ESR1](#) or [PIK3CA](#) tumor gene mutations).
- Whether you have a [BRCA1](#) or [BRCA2](#) inherited gene mutation.
- Your overall health, age, menopausal status and other medical issues.
- Your personal treatment goals and preferences.

Modern treatments continue to improve survival. However, survival for MBC varies from person to person.

How do I get support?

It's normal to feel angry, sad, shocked, anxious and overwhelmed. You don't have to face this alone.

You might consider a cancer [support group](#) (in person or online). You can also get more formal support like counseling with a mental health expert in a one-on-one or group setting. Or you may prefer talking with another person living with metastatic breast cancer through a peer mentoring program. A social worker or [patient navigator](#) can help you find these resources. [Support](#) from family, friends and others may improve your emotional well-being and quality of life by helping 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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