

# Drug boosts survival when breast cancer spreads to brain

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Treatment with lapatinib could extend survival in women with Her2-positive breast cancer that has spread to the brain, according to research published today in the *British Journal of Cancer*.

Researchers at the Medical University of Vienna looked at the average survival of a group of 43 women with Her2-positive breast cancer that had spread to the brain – 28 had been treated with herceptin and 15 had also received [lapatinib](#). While the women treated with herceptin survived for 13 months on average, more than half who were treated with lapatinib were alive after two years<sup>2</sup>.

This group were all compared with a control group of 37 women who were treated before the use of herceptin became routine and received no targeted treatment. In this group women treated with chemotherapy survived for nine months on average and those given radiotherapy only survived an average of three months.

Her2-positive breast cancer is more likely to spread to the brain and this problem has been increasing in the last decade. Lapatanib is a type of biological therapy called a protein tyrosine kinase inhibitor, which blocks a group of proteins that stimulate cancer cells to grow.

Unlike many other drugs, lapatinib is a small molecule that is more likely to cross the blood-brain barrier.

Professor Guenther Steger, study author based at the Medical University

of Vienna, said: “These results are very promising, but we’ve only studied a small and very specific group of women. We now need to look at the effect of lapatinib in a larger group of women with Her2-positive breast cancer to see if the same improvements in survival are seen.”

Dr Julie Sharp, senior science information manager at Cancer Research UK, said: “Women with Her2-positive breast cancer appear to have a greater risk of their disease spreading to the brain, which is very difficult to treat.. If lapatinib is proven to work in a larger group of women we could have a powerful new approach to prevent and treat the spread of [breast cancer](#) to the [brain](#).”

**More information:** Steger, G, G., et al. Impact of anti-Her2 therapy on overall survival in Her2-overexpressing breast cancer patients with brain metastases British Journal of Cancer (2011) [DOI: 10.1038/bjc.2011.531](#)

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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