

# Many women with breast cancer have poor knowledge about their condition

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A new analysis has found that many women with breast cancer lack knowledge about their illness, with minority patients less likely than white patients to know and report accurate information about their tumors' characteristics. Published early online in *Cancer*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society, the findings highlight the need to educate patients about their health conditions, which could lead to more informed treatment decisions.

Having knowledge about your own [health conditions](#) or your risk of developing different conditions can help you take steps to maintain or improve your health. Although previous studies have examined general cancer knowledge, no prior study has examined whether women actually know and understand the details about their own cancers. Rachel Freedman, MD, MPH, of the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston, and her colleagues surveyed 500 women with [breast cancer](#) to see how knowledgeable they were about their own cancers, including the tumor stage, grade, and receptor status (also known as breast cancer subtype). Overall, 32 percent to 82 percent reported that they knew each of the [tumor characteristics](#) that they were asked about, while only 20 percent to 58 percent actually reported these characteristics correctly. Black and Hispanic women were often less likely than white women to know their cancer characteristics, even after accounting for socioeconomic status and [health literacy](#). After accounting for health literacy and educational attainment in particular, some of the knowledge deficits went away for Hispanic women but health literacy had little impact on the findings for black women.

"Our results illustrate the lack of understanding many patients have about their cancers and have identified a critical need for improved patient education and provider awareness of this issue," said Dr. Freedman. "Improving patients' understanding about why a particular treatment is important for her individual situation may lead to more informed decisions and better adherence to treatment." Dr. Freedman noted that improved understanding of one's tumor characteristics and the reasons for personalized treatment recommendations could also improve a woman's trust, confidence, and satisfaction with her cancer treatment providers.

**More information:** "Racial/ethnic disparities in knowledge about one's breast cancer characteristics." Rachel A. Freedman, Elena M. Kouri, Dee W. West, and Nancy L. Keating; Published Online: January 26, 2015. [DOI: 10.1002/cncr.28977](https://doi.org/10.1002/cncr.28977)

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