

What to know about metastatic breast cancer

6 October 2021, by Laurel Kelly



Three-dimensional culture of human breast cancer cells, with DNA stained blue and a protein in the cell surface membrane stained green. Image created in 2014 by Tom Misteli, Ph.D., and Karen Meaburn, Ph.D. at the NIH IRP.

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, which makes this a good time to learn more about metastatic breast cancer.

Breast cancer will affect 1 in 8 women, according to the American Cancer Society. After [skin cancer](#), [breast cancer](#) is the most common cancer diagnosed in women in the U.S.

Metastatic breast cancer is cancer that originated in the breasts and has spread to other parts of the body. It may be apparent at the time of initial

breast cancer diagnosis and treatment, or it can occur months or years later as recurrent breast cancer.

If you've been diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer, a second opinion can help make sure your treatment plan is the best option for your cancer. A second opinion may be the same as your original diagnosis and treatment plan. This can give you peace of mind. A second opinion also may provide more details about your breast cancer and other treatment options for you to consider.

You may not want to get a second opinion, and that's OK, too. If you are confident in your health care provider's judgment, or have researched your cancer and are comfortable with your treatment plan, you may decide to forgo a [second opinion](#).

Whether you're newly diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer, or a previously treated breast cancer has recurred or progressed to this [advanced stage](#), treatment of your metastatic breast cancer likely will be very different than early stage breast cancer treatment. The goals and aggressiveness of your treatment options will depend on your situation and preferences. Understanding what you want out of treatment can guide your treatment decisions.

It is critical to discuss your treatment goals with your health care provider and loved ones. Dr. Timothy Moynihan, an emeritus Mayo Clinic medical oncologist, shares his advice on issues to discuss and questions to get the conversations started.

Living with [metastatic breast cancer](#) can be stressful, and the side effects of treatment can affect your quality of life. Palliative care can help manage your symptoms so you feel better physically and emotionally. People who receive [palliative care](#) have a wide range of health conditions, such as cancer, Parkinson's disease, heart disease, dementia, kidney failure and stroke.

Palliative care is useful when navigating an illness because it helps you and your loved ones feel better. Talk to your [health care provider](#) about the benefits of palliative care and the services offered through your health care organization.

Having a support network during this difficult time can make a positive difference. Support may come in many forms, including your health care team, your friends and family, and [online forums](#) with people who share your fears and concerns. What works best for you depends on your personality and situation.

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