

Stages of **breast cancer**

Breast cancer is considered recurrent when the original cancer has come back after treatment. It can come back months or years after it has been treated. Once it has spread to another part of your body, it is known as recurrent secondary breast cancer.¹

When your first diagnosis is secondary breast cancer, it means that the cancer has already spread to another part of your body before it was found in your breast.² Your doctor may call this de novo metastatic breast cancer. De novo means from the beginning.

When doctors diagnose breast cancer, they give it a stage from 0 to 4. In most cases, the stage is based on factors such as the size of the tumour and whether it has spread to the lymph nodes or other parts of the body. **The higher the stage, the more likely that³:**

- The tumour is larger
- The cancer has spread to other parts of the body or to the lymph nodes (small bean-shaped glands that are a part of the immune system and found throughout the body)⁴

You may also hear the terms advanced, metastatic, recurrent, or progression. Here is a breakdown of what those terms can mean.

If you hear...	It may mean that the cancer...
Advanced⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is stage 3 or stage 4 • Has started in the breast but has spread to nearby tissues or lymph nodes or another part of the body • Can be called metastatic or locally advanced
Metastatic⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is stage 4 • Has started in the breast but has spread to another part of the body • Can be described as advanced or secondary
Recurrent²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was treated • Came back in the same place as the original cancer (local recurrence) or spread to other areas of your body (distant recurrence): can happen months or years after treatment • Can be called metastatic
Progression⁵	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is continuing to grow or spread

A person might have active cancer at times or have cancer that is in remission at other times.⁶ Many different treatments – alone, in combination, or in a sequence – are often used to slow the progression of the disease.⁵

References

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