



# Getting to grips with the stages of breast cancer

## What is staging in breast cancer?

Cancer staging refers to the process of determining how much cancer you have in your body and where it is located. It is used to work out the severity of a person's cancer, from the original tumour to the extent at which it has spread elsewhere in the body<sup>1</sup>.

When doctors diagnose breast cancer, they give it a stage from 1 to 4 (usually written in roman numerals like in the table on page 2). 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, surrounding tissue or other parts of the body. The higher the stage, the more likely that<sup>2</sup>:

- 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<sup>3</sup>)



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The Moments That Count campaign has been developed and funded by Novartis Pharmaceuticals UK Limited. It has been created in collaboration with breast cancer patients whose knowledge and insights have informed the content and direction for the campaign.

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## Why is staging important?

**Staging gives your multidisciplinary team (MDT) an indication of the severity of your cancer and therefore an idea of which treatment is appropriate for you. For example, if your cancer is stage I (just in one place in your body), your MDT will likely give you a local treatment (a treatment that treats only one part of your body)<sup>1</sup>.**

On the other hand, if your cancer has spread, you may need a treatment that circulates throughout your entire body. These are known as systemic treatments and include:

- Chemotherapy
- Immunotherapy
- Hormone therapy
- Targeted cancer drugs

## What are the stages?

If you hear...	It usually means...
<b>Stage I breast cancer</b> Also known as primary (PBC) or early breast cancer.	The cancer is small and tends to be contained within the breast tissue <sup>1</sup> .
<b>Stage II breast cancer</b>	The cancer tumour is larger than in stage I but hasn't yet begun to spread into the tissue surrounding it <sup>1</sup> .
<b>Stage III breast cancer</b> Also known as advanced (ABC)	The cancer is larger. It could have spread to surrounding tissues or reached the nearest lymph nodes to the primary site <sup>1</sup> .
<b>Stage IV breast cancer</b> Also known as advanced (ABC), secondary (SBC) or metastatic (METS)	The cancer has spread to other parts of the body via the lymphatic system <sup>1</sup> .

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## Other cancer staging terms you might hear

### Breast cancer recurrence

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<sup>4</sup>.

### Breast cancer progression

Breast cancer progression is where the breast cancer continues to grow or spread despite treatment, as shown on imaging tests or physical examination of the tumour. A person might have active cancer at times or have cancer that is in remission at other times. Many different treatments – alone, in combination, or in a sequence – are often used to slow the progression of the disease<sup>5</sup>.

### De novo breast cancer

When your initial diagnosis is secondary, or advanced, breast cancer, it means that the cancer has already spread to another part of your body before it was found in your breast<sup>4</sup>. Your doctor may call this de novo metastatic breast cancer. De novo means from the beginning.

## References

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