

Male Breast Cancer: Diagnosis



Breast cancer is often associated with women. But it's important to note that men can get it, too. In fact, for every 100 cases of breast cancer in the U.S., one of those diagnoses is for a man.

While breast cancer can appear at any time in men, it's often found in those older than age 50. The average age at diagnosis is 65. No matter your age, diagnosing breast cancer early leads to the best treatment outcomes.

Going through a cancer diagnosis is a nerve-racking experience. And it can bring out many emotions. Just remember that it's the first step toward understanding your situation and finding the best path forward.

Gender words are used here to talk about anatomy and health risk. Please use this information in a way that works best for you and your provider as you talk about your care.

How is male breast cancer diagnosed?

Like breast cancer in women, getting the right diagnosis is a multistep process. First, your healthcare provider will ask about your:

- Lifestyle habits
- Family health history
- Any past health problems or illnesses

This information paints an initial picture of your overall health.

Your provider will do a physical exam, including a clinical breast exam. Your provider will check for lumps or tissue changes in your breast and under your arm. They may check your nipples for fluid discharge.

To get a closer look at the breast tissue, your healthcare provider might recommend imaging tests. These could include:

- **A diagnostic mammogram.** This test is an X-ray of the breast tissue. A machine presses your breast between 2 flat plates for a few seconds. It may be uncomfortable.
- **An ultrasound.** This test uses sound waves to make pictures of breast tissue. You may feel mild pressure as the instrument is moved over your breast, but it's not painful. This test can check if a lump or mass is solid or filled with fluid.

The last step is a biopsy. This test is the only sure way to confirm a breast cancer diagnosis.

What's involved in a biopsy?

For a biopsy, a healthcare provider removes tissue from the area of concern. The tissue sample is sent to a lab where the cells are checked for cancer. If they are cancerous, the lab will identify the type of cancer and do tests to learn more about it to help guide the treatment plan.

There are several types of biopsies to check for breast cancer. You may have 1 of the following:

- **Fine-needle aspiration (FNA) biopsy.** This test removes a small sample of tissue or fluid using a thin needle. The provider may use an ultrasound to guide the needle.
- **Core needle biopsy (CNB).** This test removes tissue using a wide, hollow needle. CNB is the most common type of biopsy for breast cancer. More tissue is removed with this type of biopsy than with an FNA. Several cylinders of tissue may be removed. The provider may use an ultrasound or MRI to guide the needle.

- **Excisional biopsy.** This test removes an entire lump with surgery.
- **Incisional biopsy.** This test removes part of a lump or tissue sample with surgery.

You may also have a lymph node biopsy to check if cancer has spread to your lymph nodes under your arm.

Ask your healthcare provider about how and when you will get the results of your biopsy. You may need more tests after a breast cancer diagnosis is confirmed. Undergoing tests and waiting for results can be overwhelming. Lean into the support of loved ones and your healthcare team to help you navigate each step along the way.

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