

# Male Breast Cancer: Treatment Choices



There are many treatment choices for male breast cancer. Which may work best for you? It depends on a number of factors. These include the type, size, location, and stage of the cancer. Other factors include your age, overall health, your personal preferences, and the side effects you'll find acceptable.

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.

## Learning about your treatment options

You may have questions and concerns about your treatment options. You may want to know how you'll feel, how you'll look, and how your body will work after treatment. You may also want to know if you'll have to change your normal activities.

Your healthcare provider is the best person to answer your questions. Your provider can tell you what your treatment choices are, how well they're expected to work, and what the risks and side effects are. A specific treatment might be recommended. Or you may be offered more than 1 choice and asked to decide which one you'd like to use. It can be hard to make this decision. It's important to take the time you need to make the best decision for you.

Choosing the best plan may take some time. Talk with your healthcare provider about how much time you can take to look at your options. You may want to get another opinion before deciding on your treatment plan. You may also want to involve your family and friends in this process.

## Who treats male breast cancer?

Your healthcare team may include these providers:

- **Surgical oncologist.** This is a healthcare provider who treats cancer with surgery.
- **Radiation oncologist.** This is a provider who treats cancer with radiation therapy.
- **Medical oncologist.** This is a provider who treats cancer with medicines,. These can include chemotherapy, hormone therapy, immunotherapy, or targeted therapy.

You might also work with specialists such as nurse practitioners, nurses, physician assistants, psychologists, social workers, counselors, nutritionists, and genetic counselors. Complementary medicine providers such as acupuncturists, massage therapists, and others can also help during treatment.

## Understanding the goals of treatment for male breast cancer

The goals of male breast cancer treatment can be 1 or more of the following:

- Removing the cancer in the breast
- Removing or destroying tumors in other parts of the body
- Killing or stopping the growth or spread of cancer cells
- Preventing or delaying the cancer's return
- Easing symptoms from the cancer

## Types of treatment for male breast cancer

You may have more than 1 treatment. The treatments you have depend on your age, general health, and the type, grade, location, and stage of breast cancer. Here's an overview of each type of treatment:

## Surgery

Surgery may be used to remove the cancer, remove lymph nodes, or ease symptoms of advanced cancer. Surgeries for male breast cancer include:

- **Lumpectomy or breast-sparing surgery.** In this surgery, your surgeon removes only part of the breast that contains the cancer.
- **Mastectomy.** There are several types of mastectomy. In a simple or total mastectomy, your whole breast (including the breast tissue, areola, nipple, and skin) is removed. In a modified radical mastectomy, the entire breast and lymph nodes under your arm are removed. In a radical mastectomy, your entire breast, lymph nodes under your arm, and chest wall muscles under the breast are removed.
- **Sentinel lymph node biopsy.** In this surgery, the surgeon takes out only 1 or a few lymph nodes under the arm to find out whether cancer cells have spread there. If cancer is found in these lymph nodes, further surgery may be done.
- **Axillary lymph node dissection.** The surgeon takes out many lymph nodes from under the arm.

## Radiation therapy

Radiation therapy is a treatment that uses powerful rays or other particles to kill cancer cells. It's often used in addition to other treatments. It may be used after surgery to kill any leftover cancer cells in the breast, chest, or armpit. It may also be used if the breast cancer has spread to the brain or bones.

External beam radiation is the most common type of radiation used for breast cancer in men. In this treatment, a machine aims the rays at the cancer from outside the body. It's like getting an X-ray, but it takes longer. It doesn't hurt. Radiation therapy is often given 5 days a week for several weeks.

## Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy (chemo) uses medicines to kill cancer cells. Chemo for breast cancer is usually given as an injection or infusion through a vein in your arm (IV). You might have chemotherapy before surgery to shrink tumors. Or you may have it after surgery to kill any cancer cells that were left behind. Chemotherapy can also be the main treatment for advanced breast cancer.

## Hormone therapy

In hormone therapy, you take medicines to block or change hormones that affect breast cancer growth. About 90% of breast cancers in men are hormone receptor-positive. That means the hormones estrogen or progesterone can make the cancer grow. Hormone therapy medicines may be given as pills or injections.

## Targeted therapy

Targeted therapy uses medicines to target specific changes in cancer cells that cause them to grow. You can have this therapy by itself or with other treatments. You might have it when chemotherapy hasn't worked. These medicines may be given as an IV infusion, pill, or injection.

## Immunotherapy

Immunotherapy uses medicines to help your immune system find and kill cancer cells. It may be useful for some kinds of breast cancer. It may be used alone or with other treatments, such as chemo. Immunotherapy is given as an IV infusion.

## Supportive or palliative care

Your healthcare provider will use treatments that help ease your symptoms, but don't treat the cancer. These are often used along with other treatments. For instance, pain medicine can be used to ease pain caused by the tumor. This doesn't treat the tumor, but it helps with the symptoms.

## **Clinical trials for new treatments**

Researchers are always looking for new ways to treat cancer. These new methods are tested in clinical trials. Talk with your healthcare provider to find out if there are any clinical trials you could consider.

## **Complementary medicine**

It might be useful to add complementary methods to your treatment plan. These can include special diets, vitamins, herbal remedies, massage, acupuncture, and more. They can help manage symptoms, relieve stress, and improve treatment outcomes. Talk about such treatments with your healthcare team. They could interact with your traditional treatments.

## **Choosing not to treat or stop treatment**

Maybe you've tried several treatments and they haven't worked. Or your cancer is unlikely to respond to treatment. Then you and your provider might talk about the risks and benefits of not having treatment or stopping treatment.

## **Talking with your healthcare provider**

At first, thinking about treatment options may seem overwhelming. Talk with your healthcare providers, nurses, and loved ones. Make a list of questions. Ask where you can learn more about your options. Consider the benefits and possible side effects of each option. Discuss your concerns with your healthcare provider before making a decision. You may want to get a second opinion. Getting the input from another provider can help you feel more sure about the plan you choose.

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