

Patient information from BMJ

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Breast cancer: questions to ask your doctor

If you've been diagnosed with breast cancer, you may want to talk to your doctor to find out more.

Here are some questions you might want to ask, depending on your own situation.

- Has my breast cancer spread outside my breast? What stage is my cancer?
- How big is my tumor?
- Can I have surgery that removes only the lump (breast-conserving surgery) and not the whole breast (mastectomy)?
- Did my breast cancer happen because of genes I have inherited?
- What will you do to find out if my breast cancer has spread to the lymph nodes in my armpit and to other nodes?
- What treatment will I need after surgery?
- What side effects can I expect from surgery and other treatments?
- Is my breast cancer affected by the hormone estrogen (is it estrogen-receptor positive)? (This can affect how your cancer might be treated and how it may respond to the treatments.)
- Do I have HER-2 positive breast cancer (this means the cancer cells make too much of a protein called HER-2)? (This can also affect your treatment.)
- Will my surgery be done by a breast surgeon? (This can be a difficult question to ask, but research suggests there is improved success when your surgeon is more experienced in carrying out the specific breast cancer surgery you are having.)
- Do any of my lymph nodes have cancer cells in them? If so, how many?
- How abnormal do the cancer cells look under a microscope? (This can tell you how likely it is that your tumor will spread and what kind of treatment you need.)
- Will I need chemotherapy after surgery? If so, what type and for how long?
- Will I need radiation therapy? If so, for how long?

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- Will I need hormone therapy? If so, what type and for how long?
- If I have a mastectomy, should I have breast-reconstruction surgery? If so, when should it be done and what type of surgeon should do it?
- Are other people in my family more likely than most women to get breast cancer? Should they have check-ups more often?
- Is there anything I can do at home (for example, changes to my diet or exercise) to improve the chances of my treatment being successful?
- Will having breast cancer, or receiving treatment for breast cancer, affect any future pregnancies? Would I still be able to breastfeed?

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