

# Breast cancer

If breast cancer is found and treated early, you have a good chance of getting better.

## What is breast cancer?

- It develops when cells lining the breast ducts or lobules grow abnormally and out of control.
- Most breast cancers are found when they have spread outside the ducts or lobules of the breast into the surrounding tissue. This is called invasive breast cancer. There are three types:
  - early breast cancer
  - locally advanced breast cancer
  - advanced breast cancer.

## How will I know I have breast cancer?

Breast problems can vary, but you may notice the following:

- a lump, lumpiness or thickening of the breast or underarm area
- change to the skin of the breast – dimpling (like an orange)
- change to the shape or size of the breast
- changes to the nipple – shape, discharge (ooze) or a nipple that turns in when it used to stick out
- constant or unusual pain in the breast or nipple.

If you have any of these problems, see your doctor. You will have some tests to work out if you have breast cancer.

## What do the test results mean?

The test results will tell the doctor what type of breast cancer you have, and if the cancer has spread (the stage). This information helps the doctors decide what treatment you need.

**BREAST CANCER**

**Staging**

**Stage I** – the cancer is less than 2 cm in diameter and has not spread to the lymph nodes in the armpit

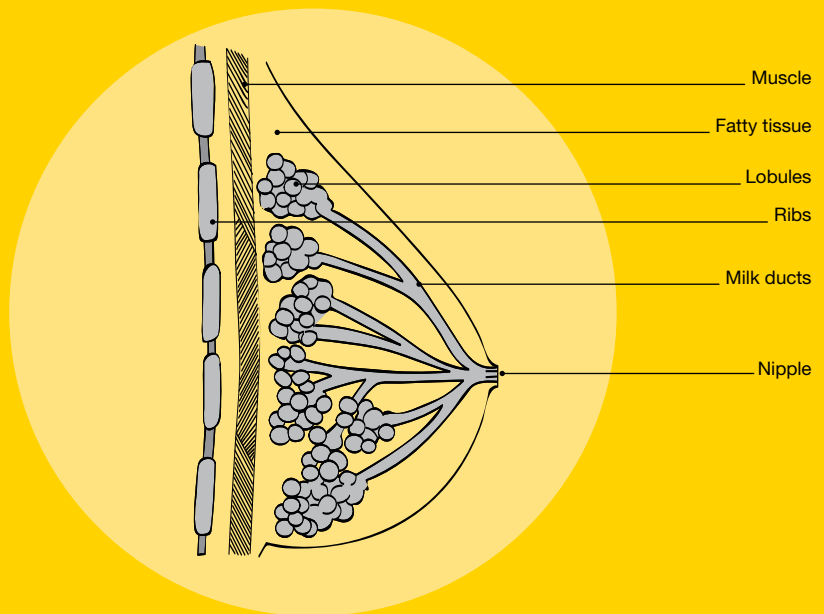
**Stage IIA** – the tumour is less than 2 cm in diameter and has spread to the lymph nodes in the armpit

the tumour is between 2 cm and 5 cm in diameter and has not spread to the lymph nodes in the armpit

**Stage IIB** – the tumour is 2–5 cm in diameter and has spread to the lymph nodes

**The breast**

The picture below shows a woman's breast. Breasts come in all shapes and sizes. Inside the breasts are milk glands, which make milk if a woman has a baby. The milk glands are made up of lobules and the milk ducts.



**Lobules**

These are the places where milk is made.

**Milk ducts**

These are the tubes that carry milk to the nipples.

**Nipple**

Milk comes out of the nipple.

**BREAST CANCER**

**What treatment will I need?**

There are different types of treatment for breast cancer. You may have one or more of these treatments:

- **Surgery** – removes part of the breast (breast-conserving surgery) or the whole breast (mastectomy)
- **Radiotherapy** – uses radiation to kill or injure cancer cells
- **Chemotherapy** – uses drugs to kill or injure cancer cells
- **Targeted therapy** – makes the immune system stronger so it can fight cancer. This is given as an injection, called Herceptin
- **Hormone therapy** – slows the production of the female hormone oestrogen that can make the cancer grow. Hormone therapy is taken as a tablet. A common one is called Tamoxifen

**How will the treatment affect my body?**

Treatment for breast cancer can cause problems, including:

- **Swelling of the arm** – This can happen if you have radiotherapy to the armpit or if lymph nodes are removed.
- **Hair falling out** – This can happen with some chemotherapy drugs.

**How do I manage the cancer?**

It is normal for you and your family to have lots of different feelings right now. Talking with your doctor, nurse or health care professional will help answer any questions you may have.

Depending on where you live, you might need to travel for treatment. You can get help to pay for travel and accommodation.

**For more information**

- Call Cancer Council 13 11 20
- Visit [www.cancercouncil.com.au](http://www.cancercouncil.com.au)
- Visit [www.menzies.edu.au/cancer](http://www.menzies.edu.au/cancer)
- For current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cancer related statistics, see [www.aihw.gov.au](http://www.aihw.gov.au)

*This information has been adapted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by Menzies School of Health Research in consultation with a Clinical Advisory Group and an Indigenous Consultation group. Production by Cancer Council.*