

The three most common types of breast cancer

Millions of women across the globe are diagnosed with breast cancer every year. The World Cancer Research Fund and the American Institute for Cancer Research notes that more than two million new cases of breast cancer were diagnosed in 2018, making the disease one of the most commonly occurring cancers in the world.

Upon receiving a breast cancer diagnosis, patients typically have a number of questions, including which type of breast cancer they have. The American Cancer Society notes that there are many types of breast cancer, though some are more common than others. Learning to distinguish between the more common types of breast cancer, which include invasive ductal carcinoma, ductal carcinoma in situ and invasive lobular carcinoma, can help patients and their support teams better understand this difficult, yet beatable disease.

What are carcinomas?

The ACS reports that most breast cancers are carcinomas. Carcinomas are tumors that start in the epithelial cells that

line organs and tissue throughout the body. Carcinomas can spread to other parts of the body, even though they do not always do so.

Invasive ductal carcinoma

Sometimes referred to as “IDC,” invasive ductal carcinoma accounts for between 70 and 80 percent of all breast cancers, making it the most common type of the disease, according to the National Breast Cancer Foundation, Inc.®. Invasive means the cancer has spread from the milk ducts, where IDC originates, to the surrounding breast tissues.

Ductal carcinoma in situ

Ductal carcinoma in situ, or DCIS, is a non-invasive breast cancer that starts inside the milk ducts. BreastCancer.org notes that “in situ” means the cancer is still in its original place, not having spread beyond the milk duct to any surrounding breast tissue. That’s helpful to know, as it calms patients’ fears knowing the cancer has been caught before it could metastasize, or spread. One out of every five new breast cancer cases is DCIS. While that

might sound alarming, BreastCancer.org notes that DCIS incidence rates are possibly so high because people are living longer than they used to (a person’s risk for breast cancer increases with age) and education about breast cancer screening appears to be working, compelling more women to get mammograms.

Invasive lobular carcinoma

The ACS notes that roughly 10 percent of all invasive breast cancers are invasive lobular carcinomas, or ILC. The word “lobular” means that the cancer began in the lobules, which produce milk and empty out into the ducts that carry milk to the nipple. When a person is diagnosed with ILC, that means the cancer has broken through the wall of the lobule and has started invading the tissues of the breast. Over time, ILC can spread to the lymph nodes and possibly even other areas of the body.

The type of breast cancer a person has will affect his or her treatment. As prevalent as breast cancer may seem, it is beatable, and many people overcome the disease and go on to live happy, full lives.



Breast cancer signs and symptoms

Breast cancer is a formidable foe. According to the World Health Organization, an estimated 627,000 women lost their lives to breast cancer in 2018. But women are not helpless in the fight against breast cancer, as the WHO notes early detection is critical and could potentially save thousands of lives each year.

A proactive approach is a key component of protecting oneself against breast cancer. While the National Breast Cancer Foundation, Inc.® notes that many breast cancer symptoms are invisible and not noticeable without a professional cancer screening, women can keep an eye out for certain signs of breast cancer they might be able to detect on their own. Monthly self-exams can help women more easily identify changes in their breasts. During such self-exams, women can look for the following signs

and symptoms and are advised to report any abnormalities they discover to their physicians immediately.

- Changes in how the breast or nipple feels: The NBCF says nipple tenderness or a lump or thickening in or near the breast or underarm could indicate the presence of breast cancer. Some women may notice changes in the skin texture or an enlargement of the pores in the skin of their breast. In many instances, skin texture has been described as being similar to the texture of an orange peel. Lumps in the breast also may indicate breast cancer, though not all lumps are cancerous.
- Change in appearance of the breast or nipple: Unexplained changes in the size or shape of the breast; dimpling anywhere on the breast; unexplained swelling or shrinking of the breast, particularly when the shrinking or swelling is exclusive

to one side only; and a nipple that is turned slightly inward or inverted are some signs and symptoms of breast cancer that can affect the appearance of the breast or nipple. It is common for women’s breasts to be asymmetrical, but sudden asymmetry should be brought to the attention of a physician.

- Discharge from the nipple: The NBCF notes that any discharge from the nipple, but particularly a clear or bloody discharge, could be a sign of breast cancer. The NBCF also advises women that a milky discharge when they are not breastfeeding is not linked to breast cancer but should be discussed with a physician.

Learning to recognize the signs and symptoms of breast cancer can increase the likelihood of early diagnosis, which greatly improves women’s chances of surviving this disease.



It is estimated that more than 200,000 women in the United States will be diagnosed with breast cancer this year, but we find hope in knowing that there are **more than 2.9 million breast cancer survivors in the U.S. today.** Great strides have been made in early detection and treatment of breast cancer, and these survivors are living proof.

During Breast Cancer Awareness Month join us in bringing awareness to prevention, treatment and survival for breast cancer patients.

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