

WHAT IS Breast Cancer?

The human body is made of tiny building blocks called cells. As old cells grow old, your body makes new healthy ones to replace them.

Sometimes a cell becomes abnormal and learns to copy itself over and over again without dying. When this occurs, these cells become a tumour or cancer. Because cancer cells keep multiplying, they can get bigger in size and form a lump within the organ in the body that it comes from.

Breast cancer is a type of tumour that started as cells from the breast. Breast cancers usually happen in women but rarely can occur in men.

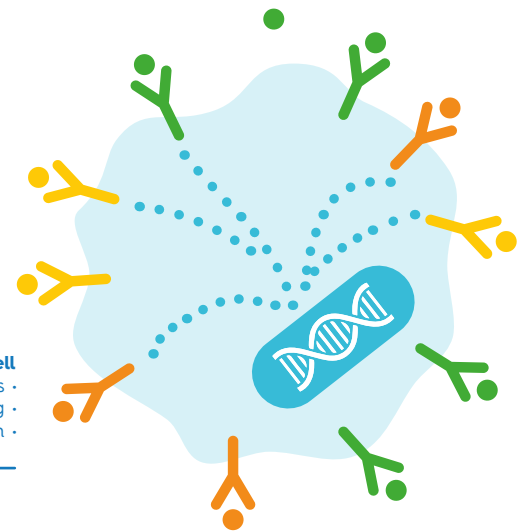


Normal Breast Cell

- Normal number of receptors
- Normal amount of growth signals
- Normal cell division

Breast Cancer Cell

- More receptors
- Increase growth signalling
- Abnormal, accelerated cell division



HOW DO WE TREAT Breast Cancer?

Breast cancer can be removed or "cut out" by surgery if it is in the breast or if it has spread to the lymph glands in the arm pit. We can "cure" this type of breast cancer that is called "early breast cancer."

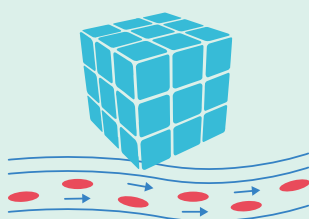
After we have removed the cancer, we do many special tests to see if the cancer needs other treatment like radiation, chemotherapy and anti-hormone tablets.

Radiation treatment is a "super" version of x-rays and helps to treat left over cancer cells that can't be seen at surgery. This treatment is usually given to the breast or the surrounding lymph glands in the arm pit and can take several weeks to finish.

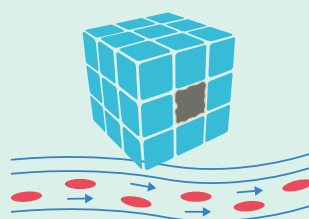
Chemotherapy are drugs that also help to treat left over cancer cells that can't be seen at surgery or may have spread into the blood stream. As chemotherapy is given as a drip into the veins or sometimes as a tablet, it can treat the entire body. An entire course of chemotherapy can take several months of treatment.

Hormone blocking tablets can be given to some women and men with breast cancers, where the cancer cells are encouraged to grow by hormones such as oestrogen or progesterone (these two hormones are naturally found in women and men). These tablets are taken every day, usually for 5 years.

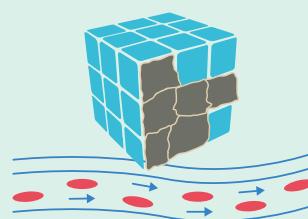
Sometimes breast cancer cells can spread to other parts of the body and be seen on scans, which is called advanced or "metastatic" cancer. The way we treat metastatic breast cancer is different to the way we treat "early breast cancer" but metastatic breast cancer can be controlled often for years with hormone blocking agents or chemotherapy.



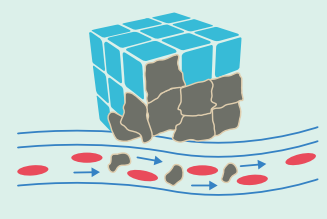
Normal breast tissue



A breast cell mutates and becomes cancerous



The breast cancer cells grow rapidly and form a mass



Breast cancer cells can enter the blood stream and travel to other parts of the body

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS OF **Chemotherapy**?

There are many different chemotherapy drugs that have different side effects that are very treatable. The most common side effect is it can make people feel more tired for a few days to a week after treatment. People on chemotherapy often need to rest more or need a bit more help around the house while they are on treatment. They might also feel like not eating for a few days after chemotherapy. Sometimes they will need different foods to eat.

People receiving chemotherapy can get infections quite easily and can become very sick if they are close to

someone else who is unwell. So if friends or family are unwell, like if they have a cold, they should stay away from someone who is receiving chemotherapy. Chemotherapy can also cause hair loss after 1-2 weeks of treatment - this is quite normal and is not painful. After chemotherapy is finished, the hair will re-grow.

There are many possible side effects of chemotherapy and the doctors and nurses caring for your mother will have discussed them in detail with your parent. If you want to know more about the side effects, it is a really good idea to ask the treating team.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS OF **Radiation Treatment**?

Radiation treatment can cause redness and sometimes peeling of the skin that can be controlled with creams. Occasionally it can cause some pain but this can be controlled with simple pain killers. Your parent can feel tired after radiation treatment and might need to rest more. This tiredness often continues for a few weeks after radiation treatment finishes.

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS OF **Hormone Blocking Drugs**?

Some breast cancers are encouraged to grow by hormones called oestrogen and progesterone. This is why hormone blocking drugs can help treat the cancer. Your parent might feel a little more tired, have hot flushes, or have some aches in their hands, back or legs. This is normal and your doctor can help with some of these side effects.

IS CANCER **Painful**?

Sometimes after surgery to "cut out" the cancer there can be some pain for a couple of weeks. Your parent will be on some pain killers to keep them comfortable. The doctors or nurses can treat pain quite easily but if you are worried then please ask.

CAN I GET **Breast Cancer**?

Cancer grows in a person and you cannot catch cancer like you would with a "cold" or "flu." In some families, a tendency to grow cancer cells is passed on from your parent to the children in the genes or "instructions for the cells" but this takes many years. If you are worried about this, there are special tests your parent's doctor might do to check.



Targeted therapies work by attaching themselves to the receptors on the surface of the cell and blocking them from receiving growth signals

Example: trastuzumab blocking a HER2 receptor.

When a parent has cancer, it's common for the family's focus to change.

Some people in the family may feel left out. Your mum may be using her energy to get through their treatment, whereas your well parent may be focused on helping your mum with cancer. Your parents don't mean for you to feel left out, and it may just happen because so much is going on. As a result, cancer can mess with all parts of your life and really change things at home. Your family and personal routines may change, and initially you might have to take on a lot more responsibilities and not get to do your usual activities. However, you also have to remember that it is ok to go out with friends and have fun times, and your needs and feelings are just as important.

OTHER PLACES FOR **Information**

Your parent's doctor and nurse can help with any questions you might have. Here are some websites that have other helpful information about coping with cancer or other questions:

www.bcrc-wa.com.au

www.canteen.org.au

www.bcna.org.au

www.cancercouncil.com.au

