



What to expect during each stage of treatment and beyond

Breast cancer

This information sheet tells you what you can ask for before, during and after your breast cancer treatment. You can ask your team for more information and support.

Working with your team means you can make sure you are getting the treatment, information and support that is right for you.

1. Screening

Some breast cancers are found in screening. Screening is where your doctor does a test called a mammography at your check-up. This is an easy test where the doctor uses a type of x-ray to make a picture of the breasts. The BreastScreen Australia Program is free for women over age 40.

If you are aged 50–74 you should have a mammogram every two years. You can ask your doctor for more information or **visit** www.breastscreen.org.au

If you feel or see a lump or a change in the size or shape of your breast, go to your doctor.

2. Your doctor visit

Your doctor should ask you about any symptoms you might be having. They will do a physical examination or check-up and send you to get tests.

Your doctor should work with you to make sure you have the information and help you need. You can ask your doctor about:

- What is happening in your body and why it could be happening
- What will or might happen
- How you are feeling and how to stay emotionally healthy
- Who you can talk to and getting the support you need
- Where you can get more information and support

Your doctor will send you to get tests to check for breast cancer. These should be done within two weeks. These might include:

Ultrasound

Sound waves are used to make a picture of the breast.

Mammography

A type of x-ray of the breasts. Each breast is pressed between two x-ray plates to make a picture of it. A mammography can detect changes that are too small to feel.

Biopsy

A small sample of your breast is taken using a needle to check under the microscope.

If you have breast cancer your doctor will send you to get more tests with a specialist. Your specialist is a doctor that is trained in working with people with breast cancer.

Your doctor should give the specialist information on your health in the past, if someone else in your family has had cancer and your test results.

You can bring a family member or friend to your visits.

You can ask your doctor for more information and support to make sure you have what you need.

3. Tests

The specialist might do more tests to see how the cancer is growing or if it has spread. This is called staging.

You can ask the specialist:

- What tests you are going to have
- What will happen in the tests
- What the tests will tell you

You can ask your doctor to connect you with a breast cancer nurse. A breast cancer nurse can give you the information and support to help you stay physically and emotionally healthy.

You can ask about finding a breast cancer peer support group. It can help knowing that there are other people who understand what you are going through. Your friends and family can talk to a support group for carers.

4. Treatment

Your specialist should work with a team. Your team is made up of people that understand breast cancer.

Your team will review your test results. They should ask you what you want and need. You should work together to make the best plan for your treatment.

You can ask your team:

- What treatment you are having
- Why you are having that treatment
- What will happen in that treatment
- What the treatment will do
- How long the treatment will take
- Risks and benefits of the treatment
- How you might feel during the treatment, side effects, and what you can do to feel as well as possible
- What you can expect after the treatment

If you are a young woman your team should talk to you about fertility preservation and having a baby in the future. They can help you find information and support about the risk of early menopause, or the end of your period and hormonal changes. You can ask to talk to a fertility specialist or genetic counsellor so that you have all of the information you need to make a choice.

Your team might suggest you take part in a clinical trial. A clinical trial is used to test a new treatment, or to see if a treatment works better than another. You can ask for more time, or a second opinion before you decide on your treatment.

Complementary therapies include things like massage, acupuncture and meditation as well

as other medicines you might take at the same time as your treatment. Some therapies might not work well with your treatment. Therefore, it is very important to talk to your team about any complementary therapies you are using, or would like to use.

You might have one treatment or a mix of treatments:

Surgery is where the cancer is cut out.

Breast conserving surgery is where only the cancer and a small area around it are cut out.

Mastectomy is where the breast is removed. You can choose to have reconstructive surgery straight away or later if you have a mastectomy. Reconstructive surgery is surgery where a team rebuilds the breast.

Surgery is the most common treatment for women with early breast cancer.

Radiation therapy or radiotherapy is where radiation is used to stop the cancer growing.

It might be used after surgery if you have early breast cancer.

Chemotherapy or drug therapy is where drugs are used to stop the cancer growing.

It might be used before or after surgery.

Targeted or biological therapy is where drugs that attack the cancer cells are injected in to the body.

4. Treatment cont'd

Hormone or endocrine therapy is where you take hormones to change the way the cancer grows to stop it from spreading.

For more information about treatment and side effects you can ask your doctor or **visit** www.cancer.org.au/about-cancer/treatment

Your team should talk to you about your needs before, during and after your treatment. You can ask for information and support at any time to make sure you have everything you need. Your team can connect you with other services and health professionals to make sure you stay physically and emotionally healthy.

5. After your treatment

After your treatment is finished, your team should give you a treatment summary. Your treatment summary has all of the information on the treatment you received:

- Tests you had to diagnose your breast cancer, and the results of these tests
- Treatment you had, and when you had it
- Support services and other treatment plans you received

Your team should work with you to make a plan now that your treatment is finished. Your specialist will decide which type of specialist or doctor will be best for managing your care.

You should have a follow-up plan that includes:

- The follow-up that is best for you
- Plans for managing any side effects of treatment

- How to get help quickly if you think your cancer has come back or got worse

Your doctor should work with you and talk about:

- Finding more information and support to keep physically and emotionally healthy, and get what you need
- Signs and symptoms to look for that might mean the cancer is coming back
- Prevention and healthy living

Sometimes breast cancer can come back after treatment. It is usually found at a follow-up visit, or if you notice any symptoms come back. It is important to have regular check-ups. If you notice anything different go to your doctor. You can ask your doctor how to do your own breast checks, for a check-up and for information and support.

6. Living with cancer

Side effects

Some people get side effects during and after their treatment. Side effects are your body responding to the treatment you are having. They are normal, but can make you feel unwell.

You might have side effects straight away, not at all, or months after your treatment.

You can talk to your doctor about your side effects and get information and support to help you feel well or **visit** www.cancervic.org.au/about-cancer/survivors/long-term-side-effects

Advance care plan

Your team might work with you to make an

advance care plan. An advance care plan is a way of setting out your wishes and making sure everyone knows what you want in future medical care.

You can talk to your doctor about making an advance care plan together or **visit** www.advancecareplanning.org.au

Palliative care

Palliative care is used at different stages of your treatment to help you feel well.

Palliative care can help with pain relief, to reduce your symptoms and to improve your quality of life.

6. Living with cancer cont'd

You can talk to your doctor about the type of palliative care that is best for you or **visit** www.palliativecare.org.au

Cost

There are costs at every stage of your cancer including treatment, accommodation and travel. You might have costs if you are having treatment in a private health service even if you have private health insurance.

You can talk to your team and your private health insurer if you have questions about the cost of each treatment you might have. You can also talk to the social worker at your hospital.

You can talk to your doctor about the cost of your treatment or **visit** www.canceraustralia.gov.au/affected-cancer/living-cancer/dealing-practical-aspects-cancer/costs-treatment

You can talk to your doctor about the cost of accommodation and travel or **visit** www.cancercouncil.com.au/get-support/practical-support-services

There are a lot of things to think about when you have breast cancer.

There is also a lot of information and support. It is important that you do what is right for you. You can work with your team to make sure you have the best care.

Information and support

Breast Cancer Network Australia

- Information and support: **1800 500 258**
- www.bcna.org.au

Cancer Council

- You can talk to a cancer nurse: **13 11 20**
-  If you need an interpreter: **13 14 50**

Carers Australia

- Information and support for carers: **1800 242 636**

For more information visit
www.cancerpathways.org.au



Australian Government
Cancer Australia

