
Diagnosing Breast Cancer - A Quick Guide



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This is a brief summary of the information on 'Diagnosing breast cancer' from CancerHelp UK. You will find more detailed information on the website.

In this information there are sections on

- Breast cancer tests
- Further tests for breast cancer
- Questions for your doctor

Breast cancer tests

You usually start by seeing your GP. Your GP will examine you and if necessary refer you to a specialist breast clinic.

At the breast clinic

The doctor or specialist nurse will take your medical history and examine your breasts. They will also feel for any enlarged lymph nodes under your arms and at the base of your neck. You may also need some of the following tests.

Mammogram or ultrasound

A mammogram is an X-ray of the breasts. If you are under 35, you are more likely to have an ultrasound scan instead.

Having a biopsy

A biopsy means taking a small sample of cells or tissue from your breast and looking at them under a microscope to see if they are cancerous. Often your biopsy can be done with a local anaesthetic. But sometimes the doctor needs to do a small operation under general anaesthetic. On CancerHelp UK, we have information about the different types of biopsy you may have.

Waiting for results

It is always an anxious time waiting for test results. While you are waiting it may help to talk to a close friend or relative about how you feel. Or you may want to contact a cancer support group to talk to someone who has been through a similar experience.

Further tests for breast cancer

If the first tests show you have breast cancer your doctor may want to do further tests. This is to check the size of the cancer and whether there has been any spread to lymph nodes or to other parts of the body. This tells the doctor the stage of the cancer. The stage is important because it helps the doctor to decide on the best treatment for you.

Your breast cancer cells may also be tested to see if they have receptors for hormones or other proteins (such as HER2). This



helps the doctor to know whether hormone therapies or biological therapies (such as Herceptin) might work for you.

Blood test and chest X-ray

Most women have blood tests and a chest X-ray. Nearly everyone diagnosed with breast cancer has surgery, and these tests are part of the standard preparation before surgery.

Scans

Your doctor may want to do one or more scans. This might be to get a better picture of your breast cancer. Or to see if the cancer has spread to your liver or bones. Ultrasound, CT, MRI and bone scans are all used.

Waiting for your results

Waiting can be an anxious time. It may help to talk about your worries with a partner, close friend or relative. The breast clinic may have a trained breast care nurse or counsellor who can talk to you.

What to ask your doctor about breast cancer tests

- How do you decide on the best tests for diagnosis?
- Can I see the results of my scans during the appointment?
- Will I be told straightaway, during the liver ultrasound or bone scan, if there are signs the cancer has spread?
- How long will it take before I get the test results?
- How will I be told - do I have a choice?
- If the results show the breast cancer has spread, what needs to happen next?
- Will you test for hormone receptors?
- Will you test for HER2 receptors?

- Will I be able to see a breast care nurse at the clinic?
- Is there emotional support available at the hospital if I am anxious?

More information

For more information about breast cancer, visit our website <http://cancerhelp.cancerresearchuk.org>

You will find a wide range of detailed, up to date information for people affected by cancer, including a clinical trials database that you can search for trials in the UK. You can view or print the information in a larger size if you need to.

For answers to your questions about cancer call our Cancer Information Nurses on **0808 800 4040** 9am till 5pm Monday to Friday



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