

Patient information from BMJ

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Breast cancer: questions to ask your doctor

If you've been diagnosed with breast cancer you may want to talk to your doctor to find out more.

Here are some questions you might want to ask.

- Has my breast cancer spread outside my breast? What stage is my cancer?
- How big is my tumour?
- Can I have surgery that removes only the lump (breast-conserving surgery) and not the whole breast (mastectomy)?
- Did my breast cancer happen because of genes I have inherited?
- What will you do to find out if my breast cancer has spread to the lymph nodes in my armpit and to other nodes?
- What treatment will I need after surgery?
- What side effects can I expect from surgery and other treatments?
- Is my breast cancer affected by the hormone oestrogen (is it oestrogen-receptor positive)?
- Do I have HER-2 positive breast cancer (this means the cancer cells make too much of a protein called HER-2)?
- Will my surgery be done by a specialist breast surgeon who does more than 20 breast operations a year? (This can be a difficult question to ask, but the risk of your cancer coming back where it first started depends on whether your surgeon removes enough of the tissue around your cancer along with the cancer itself. Research suggests that experienced surgeons are better at doing this.)
- Do any of my lymph nodes have cancer cells in them? If so, how many?
- How abnormal do the cancer cells look under a microscope? (This can tell you how likely it is that your tumour will spread and what kind of treatment you need.)
- Will I need chemotherapy after surgery? If so, what type and for how long?
- Will I need radiotherapy? If so, for how long?

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- Will I need hormone therapy? If so, what type and for how long?
- If I have a mastectomy, should I have breast-reconstruction surgery? If so, when should it be done and what sort of surgeon should do it?
- Are the other women in my family more likely than most women to get breast cancer? Should they have check-ups more often?

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