

Breast cancer

If breast cancer is found and treated early, you have a very good chance of getting better.

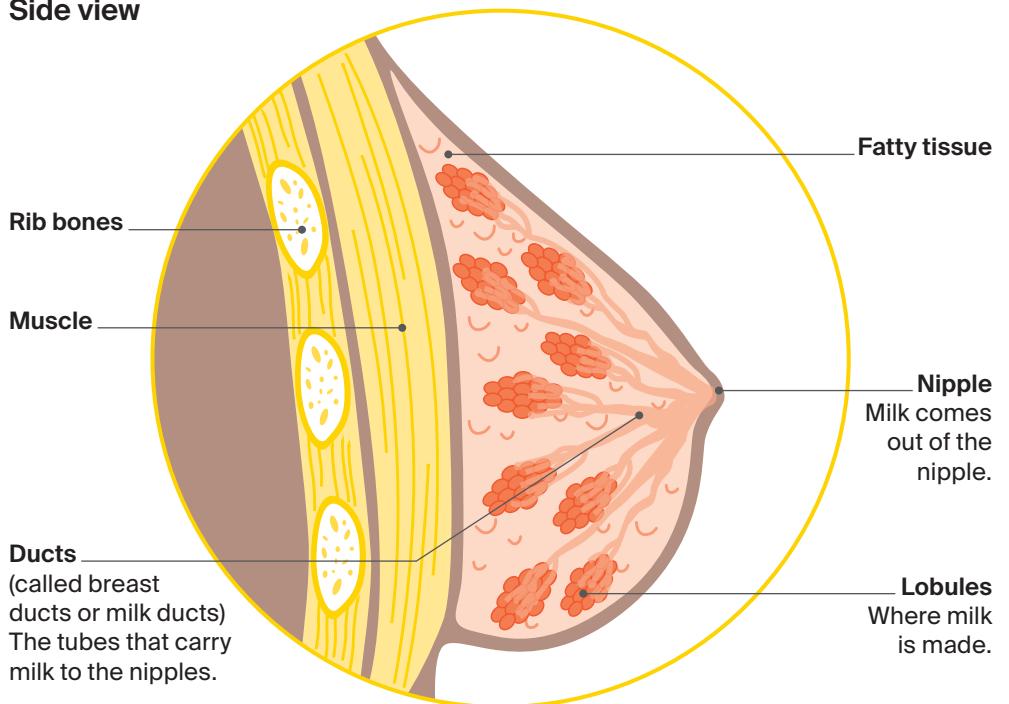
What is breast cancer?

Breast cancer develops when some cells in the breast don't work properly. These cells start to grow out of control and form a lump. This is called a tumour. Not all tumours are cancer, but they need to be tested in case they are.

The breast

Breasts come in all shapes and sizes. Inside the breasts are milk glands, which make milk if a woman has a baby. The milk glands are made up of lobules and ducts. Breast cancer can start in the lobules or the ducts.

Side view



BREAST CANCER

If you are uncomfortable about having any tests, you can ask a nurse, Aboriginal health worker or someone from your family or mob to be in the room with you.

What are the signs and symptoms of breast cancer?

You can have breast cancer without noticing anything. Or you may notice some of the following:

- a lump, lumpiness or thickening, especially in just one breast
- changes to the skin of the breast – dimpling (like the skin on an orange)
- changes to the shape or size of the breast
- changes to the nipple – shape, discharge (ooze), or a nipple that turns in when it used to stick out
- swelling, or an uncomfortable feeling under the arm or near the collarbone
- constant or unusual pain in the breast or nipple.

These signs do not always mean you have breast cancer, but it’s important to see your doctor if you notice any of these symptoms. Your doctor will do some tests to work out if you have cancer or what the problem is.

What tests will I have?

Some of the tests you may have include a:

- **Mammogram** – This is an x-ray to check the breast.
- **Ultrasound** – This is a scan that uses soundwaves to take pictures of the inside of the breast.
- **MRI scan** – This is a different type of scan that uses magnets and radio waves to take more detailed pictures of the inside of the breast.
- **Biopsy** – Medicine is used to numb the breast, then a tiny piece of breast tissue is taken out and sent to the lab for testing.

What do the test results mean?

The test results will tell the doctor if you have breast cancer, what type it is, and if the cancer has spread (the stage). Sometimes breast cancer spreads to the lymph nodes (small bean-shaped organs that help fight infections) or to other parts of the body. Knowing the stage of the breast cancer helps the doctors work out the best treatment for you.

The stages of breast cancer are:

- **Early breast cancer (stage 1 or 2)** – The cancer is only in the breast or may have spread to lymph nodes in the armpit.
- **Locally advanced breast cancer (stage 3)** – The cancer is larger than 5 cm and has spread to areas just outside the breast (like the skin or ribs) or to many lymph nodes.
- **Advanced breast cancer (stage 4)** – The cancer has spread to other parts of the body. It may be called metastatic breast cancer.

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It's important to go to all of your treatment sessions. If you miss a session, it might become harder to treat the cancer.

What treatment will I need for breast cancer?

There are different types of treatment for breast cancer. You may have one or more of these treatments:

Surgery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This removes part of the breast (breast-conserving surgery) or the whole breast (mastectomy).
Radiation therapy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This uses radiation to kill or damage cancer cells.
Chemotherapy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sometimes called "chemo", chemotherapy is strong medicine that can kill the cancer cells.
Other medicines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Special types of medicines target features of the cancer cells to stop them growing and spreading. This is called targeted therapy. Different types of medicine may be used to stop the effects of chemicals in the body (hormones), which can make some types of cancer grow. This is called hormone therapy.

How will the treatment affect me?

Treatment for breast cancer can sometimes cause other problems called side effects. Your doctor will talk to you about any side effects that might affect you.

It's important to tell your doctor, nurse or Aboriginal health worker if you notice any of these problems. There are usually things that can be done to help with these side effects.

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How do I cope with the cancer?

• **Yarn with mob**

It's normal for you and your family to have lots of different feelings right now. You might find it helpful to yarn with family, mob or Elders about coping at this time.

• **Ask questions**

You may have many questions about the cancer, its treatment and how it will affect you. Your doctor, nurse or Aboriginal health worker will help answer any questions you may have.

• **Get help with travel**

If you have to travel a long way for treatment, you can get help to pay for travel and somewhere to stay. For more information, call 13 11 20.

• **Find support**

Call 13 11 20 if you need support.

More information

• **Cancer Council**

13 11 20
Visit aboriginal.cancercouncil.com.au

• **Menzies School of Health Research**

Visit menzies.edu.au/cancer

This information was adapted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by Menzies School of Health Research in consultation with a clinical advisory group and an Indigenous consultation group. Cancer Council NSW has updated this fact sheet in consultation with cancer experts and Aboriginal people with an experience of cancer.

This fact sheet features design elements from Cancer Council NSW's respect symbol, which was designed by Marcus Lee. Marcus was born and raised in Darwin, Northern Territory, and is a descendant of the Karajarri people. The Cancer Council Australia respect symbol (below) was designed by Riki Salam as part of his *Journey of Hope* artwork. Riki was born and raised in Cairns, Queensland, on Yidindji land, and has connections to Muralag, Kala Lagaw Ya, Meriam Mer and Kuku Yalanji peoples on his father's side and the Ngai Tahu people of New Zealand on his mother's side.



Cancer Council acknowledges Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and recognises the continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and to Elders past, present and emerging.

**Call 13 11 20
if you need
support.**