

DOCTOR DISCUSSION GUIDE

Managing Breast Cancer

Being diagnosed with breast cancer can feel intimidating, but you and your doctor will work together to help take control of your symptoms. Asking the right questions during your conversation will help you know what to expect and how to better navigate your condition. Familiarize yourself with these common terms before your appointment to help facilitate your discussion.

Vocabulary to Know

Your doctor might mention these common terms. Here's what they mean.

Metastases	When cancer cells spread from their origin site to other places in the body.
Biopsy	A test that examines tissue or other specimen samples to look for cancer cells.
BRCA Genes	BRCA 1 and 2 are genes that are often associated with an increased risk of breast cancer. Everyone has BRCA genes, but in some people the genes don't work the way they are supposed to because of a defect (mutation). If a person has a mutated BRCA gene, it can increase their risk of developing breast cancer in their lifetime.
Breast Density	A measure of how much fat tissue is in a breast compared to gland and fibrous tissue. The ratios are usually noted during a mammogram, as breast density can make it harder to see tumors.
CA 125	A blood test that measures levels of cancer antigen 125 in the body. The test can be used in the diagnosis phase as well as to see how well a treatment is working.
Hormone Therapy	Patients with reproductive cancers may be put on medications to adjust the levels of hormones, such as estrogen and progesterone, in the body.
Lymphedema	Swelling and fluid retention, especially in the limbs, which can develop if lymph nodes are damaged by surgery, cancer, or treatment for cancer (such as radiation).
Mastectomy	A surgery to remove one or both breasts.
Mammogram	A special type of X-ray test to examine the tissue of the breast.
Prognosis	A doctor's prediction of how a patient's cancer will progress.
Reconstruction	Cosmetic surgery to reshape or recreate breast tissue that can be done if part or all of one or both breasts is removed (mastectomy).
Tamoxifen	A type of drug called a selective estrogen receptor modulator. It is one of the first and most commonly prescribed medications used to treat breast cancer, however, it is only prescribed for patients with certain types—and stages—of breast cancer.



Questions to Ask

These questions will help you start a conversation with your doctor about how to best manage your breast cancer.

About Symptoms

- What are the symptoms of breast cancer?
- I haven't had any symptoms, how can I have cancer?
- Are there symptoms that indicate I should go to the ER or call your office?

About Causes & Risk Factors

- What causes breast cancer?
- Do I have the gene for breast cancer?
- Can I pass this gene on to my children?
- Should other members of my family get tested?
- I have the BRCA gene. Should I have surgery to remove my breasts before cancer develops?

About Diagnosis

- What tests do I need to have?
- Are there different types of breast cancer? Which type do I have?
- How is breast cancer graded? What grade is my cancer? Will the grade change over time or with treatment?

About Treatment

- What are the side effects of the medications you prescribed?
- Will I need to have surgery?
- What are the odds the cancer will come back after remission?
- Are there any tests or screenings I will need to have?
