

Stages of Breast Cancer

Far too often I read where someone has been told she has Stage IV breast cancer, even though the cancer is still localized and has not even shown up in the lymph nodes yet. That is NOT Stage IV and, in my opinion, doctors who use that as a scare tactic to intimidate their patients into unnecessary procedures should lose their license to practice medicine.

Since so many seem to be unaware of just what the different stages represent, I want to share the following information:

Stages of Breast Cancer

The stages of breast cancer are used to refer to the extent, or progression, of the disease. Once a diagnosis of breast cancer has been made, it's important to determine the stage in order to plan treatment of the disease. The stages range from stage 0 to stage IV and recurrent cases of breast cancer.

Breast Cancer Stages: An Introduction

After a breast cancer diagnosis has been made, tests are done to find out if cancer cells have spread within the breast or to other parts of the body. This process is called staging. The information gathered from this process determines the stage of breast cancer. It is important to know the stage in order to plan breast cancer treatment. The breast cancer stages include:

- Stage 0 (including lobular carcinoma in situ and ductal carcinoma in situ)
- Stage I
- Stage II (including IIA and IIB)
- Stage III (including IIIA, IIIB, and IIIC)
- Stage IV
- Recurrent.

Stages of Breast Cancer: Stage 0 (Carcinoma in Situ)

There are two types of stage 0 breast cancer:

- Ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS)
- Lobular carcinoma in situ (LCIS).

Ductal Carcinoma in Situ (DCIS) - This is a noninvasive, precancerous condition in which abnormal cells are found in the lining of a breast duct. The abnormal cells have not spread outside the duct to other tissues in the breast. In some cases, DCIS may become invasive cancer and spread to other tissues, although it is not known at this time how to predict which lesions will become invasive.

Lobular Carcinoma in Situ (LCIS) - This is a condition in which abnormal cells are found in the lobules of the breast. This type seldom becomes invasive cancer; however, having lobular carcinoma in situ in one breast increases the risk of developing breast cancer in either breast.

Stages of Breast Cancer: Stage I

In stage I breast cancer:

- The tumor is 2 centimeters or smaller
- The tumor has not spread outside the breast.

Stages of Breast Cancer: Stage II

There are two types of stage II breast cancer:

Stage IIA

Stage IIB.

Stage IIA Breast Cancer In stage IIA breast cancer:

No tumor is found in the breast, but cancer is found in the axillary lymph nodes (the lymph nodes under the arm)

The tumor is 2 centimeters or smaller and has spread to the axillary lymph nodes

The tumor is larger than 2 centimeters but no larger than 5 centimeters and has not spread to the axillary lymph nodes.

Stage IIB Breast Cancer In stage IIB breast cancer, the tumor is either:

Larger than 2 centimeters but no larger than 5 centimeters and has spread to the axillary lymph nodes

Larger than 5 centimeters but has not spread to the axillary lymph nodes.

Stages of Breast Cancer: Stage III

There are three types of stage III breast cancer:

Stage IIIA

Stage IIIB

Stage IIIC.

Stage IIIA Breast Cancer In stage IIIA breast cancer:

No tumor is found in the breast, but cancer is found in axillary lymph nodes that are attached to each other or to other structures

The tumor is 5 centimeters or smaller and has spread to axillary lymph nodes that are attached to each other or to other structures

The tumor is larger than 5 centimeters and has spread to axillary lymph nodes that may be attached to each other or to other structures.

Stage IIIB Breast Cancer In stage IIIB breast cancer, the cancer may be any size and:

Has spread to tissues near the breast (the skin or chest wall, including the ribs and muscles in the chest)

May have spread to lymph nodes within the breast or under the arm.

Stage IIIC Breast Cancer In stage IIIC breast cancer, the cancer:

Has spread to lymph nodes beneath the collarbone and near the neck

May have spread to lymph nodes within the breast or under the arm and to tissues near the breast.

Stage IIIC breast cancer is divided into operable and inoperable stage IIIC. In operable stage IIIC, the cancer:

Is found in 10 or more of the lymph nodes under the arm

Is found in the lymph nodes beneath the collarbone and near the neck on the same side of the body as the breast with cancer

Is found in lymph nodes within the breast itself and in lymph nodes under the arm.

In inoperable stage IIIC breast cancer, the cancer has spread to the lymph nodes above the collarbone and near the neck on the same side of the body as the breast with cancer.

Stages of Breast Cancer: Stage IV

In stage IV breast cancer, the cancer has spread to other organs of the body, most often the bones, lungs, liver, or brain.

Recurrent Breast Cancer

Recurrent breast cancer is cancer that has recurred (come back) after it has been treated. The cancer may come back in the breast, in the chest wall, or in other parts of the body.

Inflammatory Breast Cancer Stages

In inflammatory breast cancer, the breast looks red and swollen and feels warm. The redness and warmth occur because the cancer cells block the lymph vessels in the skin. The skin of the breast may also show the pitted appearance called peau d'orange (like the skin of an orange).

Inflammatory breast cancer may be stage IIIB, stage IIIC, or stage IV."

I hope the above information helps clear up any misunderstandings or confusion with your 'stage' diagnosis. Please note, even though doctors may tell you that you must be staged in order for them to know how to proceed with your treatment, that is simply not the truth when it comes to natural healing. Yes, if you are going down the conventional route, staging helps the doctors determine just how aggressive they will be with your treatment. With natural healing, however, it really isn't that important as we employ the same essential healing protocols regardless of stage. I personally was never staged as I did not want to undergo the biopsy of my lymph nodes and the PET scan they said was needed in order to stage me. I knew before my diagnosis that I would heal naturally so there was no reason to expose my body to those additional risks.