

So many words...

There are so many new words to learn after a breast cancer diagnosis. This fact sheet contains some of those words that you may hear. You can refer to this sheet whenever you do not understand something. You may want to take it with you to your doctor appointments. Or you can use it to look up words that you do not understand when reading about breast cancer.

Adjuvant therapy

cancer treatment used after surgery, such as chemotherapy or hormone therapy

Alternative therapy

any non-traditional treatment used *instead* of a standard medical cancer treatment

Axillary lymph nodes

glands in the underarm that filter the lymph fluid

Aromatase inhibitor

hormone therapy drug used to lower the amount of estrogen in the body, so the cancer cells cannot grow

Benign

non-cancerous

Biopsy

removal of tissue which is then examined under a microscope for cancer cells

BRCA1 & BRCA2

inherited human genes which, when present in a mutated (altered) form, increase the risk of breast and/or ovarian cancer

Chemotherapy

the use of drugs to treat cancer by killing cancer cells

Clinical breast exam

inspection (looking) and palpation (feeling) of the breasts and underarm areas by a health care provider to check for any changes or lumps

Clinical trials

controlled research studies done with people who volunteer to test the safety and potential benefits of new ways to detect, diagnose, treat or prevent disease

Cyclical breast pain

tenderness that varies throughout the menstrual cycle, is influenced by hormones and is related to menstrual periods

Cyst

fluid-filled sacs that are almost always benign

Ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS)

a non-invasive breast cancer commonly referred to as stage 0

Estrogen

a hormone produced primarily by the ovaries that aids in developing female sex organs and in regulating monthly menstrual cycles

Fibrocystic breast changes

non-cancerous breast condition that sometimes results in painful cysts or lumpy breasts

Hormone therapy

drugs that work by interfering with the effects of hormones on cancer growth

Integrative and complementary therapy

any non-traditional cancer treatment that is used *together* with standard medical cancer treatment

Invasive cancer

the spread of cancer from the location where it started into surrounding tissue

Lobular carcinoma in situ (LCIS)

a risk factor for breast cancer

Lumpectomy (breast conserving surgery)

surgery that removes only part of the breast — the breast cancer and some normal tissue around it

Lymphedema

build-up of lymphatic fluid causing swelling due to removal of or injury to the lymph nodes

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)

test that creates an image of the breast, often used with mammography for screening women at a high risk of breast cancer

Malignant

cancerous

Mammogram

an X-ray of the breast; the best screening tool used today to find breast cancer early

Mastectomy

surgery in which the entire breast is removed

Metastasis

the spread of cancer from the breast to other parts of the body

Neoadjuvant therapy

chemotherapy or hormone therapy given before surgery to reduce the size of a tumor

Oncologist

a doctor who specializes in treating people with cancer

Palliative care

the combination of symptom and pain management therapies intended to comfort and support those with a life-threatening illness

Postmenopausal hormones

synthetic hormones used to relieve menopausal symptoms

Progesterone

a hormone that is released by the ovaries during every menstrual cycle and that helps prepare a woman's body for pregnancy and breastfeeding

Progestin

a synthetic progesterone-like ingredient found in postmenopausal hormone drugs

Prognosis

the expected or probable outcome of a disease; chance of recovery

Prosthesis (breast)

an artificial breast form that can be worn under clothing after a mastectomy

Radiation therapy (radiotherapy)

treatment using high energy X-rays to destroy cancer cells in the exposed area

Receptor

a specific location in a cancer cell that hormones attach to in order to promote growth

Reconstructive surgery

a procedure using plastic surgery to recreate a breast

Recurrence

a return of cancer in the same site or another location

Risk factors

factors that increase a person's chances of getting breast cancer

Stages of cancer

a numbering system (from 0 to 4) that indicates how advanced a breast cancer may be in order to determine outcome and treatment options

Targeted therapy

treatment that works by going to the genes and proteins in cancer cells to stop their growth and spread

Tumor

an abnormal growth or mass of tissue which may be benign (non-cancerous) or malignant (cancerous)