



# Breast Cancer Glossary

## A

**adjuvant therapy:** Treatment given after the primary treatment. Adjuvant therapy may include chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or hormone therapy.

**alveoli:** Grape-like clusters within the breast lobe: they produce milk

**areola** (a-REE-o-la): The area of dark-colored skin on the breast that surrounds the nipple.

**aspiration** (as-per-AY-shun): Removal of fluid from a lump, often a cyst, with a needle and a syringe. **Aspirate** is the fluid withdrawn from a lump, often a cyst.

**atypical hyperplasia** (hy-per-PLAY-zha): A benign (noncancerous) condition in which cells have increased and have abnormal features.

**autologous bone marrow transplantation** (aw-TAHL-o-gus): A procedure in which bone marrow is removed from a person, stored, and then put back into a patient's system after intensive treatment.

**axilla** (ak-SIL-a): The underarm or armpit. **Axillary** means having to do with the armpit.

## B

**benign** (beh-NINE): Not cancerous; does not spread to other parts of the body.

**biological therapy** (by-o-LAHJ-i-kul): Treatment that helps the immune system to fight infection and disease. Also used to lessen side-effects that may be caused by some cancer treatments. Also called immunotherapy or biological response modifier (BRM) therapy.

**biopsy** (BY-ahp-see): A procedure used to remove cells or tissues in order to look at them under a microscope. When an entire tumor or lesion is removed, the procedure is called an *excisional biopsy*. When only a sample of tissue is removed, the procedure is called an *incisional biopsy* or *core biopsy*. When a sample of tissue or fluid is removed with a needle, the procedure is called a *needle biopsy* or *fine-needle aspiration*.

**bone marrow:** The soft, sponge-like tissue in the center of bones that produces white blood cells, red blood cells, and platelets.

**breast reconstruction:** Surgery performed by a plastic surgeon to rebuild a breast's shape after a mastectomy.



## C

**cancer:** A term for diseases in which abnormal cells divide without control. Cancer cells can invade nearby tissues. They can also spread through the bloodstream and lymphatic system to other parts of the body.

**carcinoma** (kar-sin-O-ma): Cancer that begins in the skin or in tissues that line or cover internal organs.

**chemotherapy** (kee-mo-THER-a-pee): Treatment with anticancer drugs.

**clinical trial:** A research study that tests how well new medical treatments or other interventions work in people. Each study is designed to test new methods of screening, prevention, diagnosis, or treatment of a disease.

**colony-stimulating factors:** Substances that help to increase the production of blood cells. These include granulocyte colony-stimulating factors (also called G-CSF and filgrastim), granulocyte-macrophage colony-stimulating factors (also called GM-CSF and sargramostim), and promegapoeitin.

**cyst** (sist): A sac or capsule filled with fluid.

## D

**duct** (dukt): A tube through which body fluids pass.

**ductal carcinoma in situ** (DUK-tal kar-sin-O-ma in SYE-too) DCIS: Abnormal cells that involve only the lining of a duct. The cells have not spread outside the duct to other tissues in the breast. Also called intraductal carcinoma.

## E

**estrogens** (ES-tro-jins): A family of hormones that affect female sex characteristics.

## H

**hair follicles** (FOL-i-kuls): Shafts or openings on the surface of the skin through which hair grows.

**hormonal therapy:** Treatment of cancer by removing, blocking, or adding hormones. Also called *endocrine therapy*.

**hormone receptor test** : A test to measure the amount of certain proteins, called hormone receptors, in cancer tissue. Hormones can attach to these proteins. A high level of hormone receptors may mean that hormones help the cancer grow.

**hormones:** Chemicals produced by glands in the body and circulated in the bloodstream. Hormones control the actions of certain cells or organs.



## I

**inflammatory breast cancer:** A type of breast cancer in which the breast looks red and swollen and feels warm. The skin of the breast may also look pitted (like the skin of an orange). The redness and warmth occur because the cancer cells block the lymph vessels in the skin.

**invasive cancer:** Cancer that has spread beyond the layer of tissue where it started. Also called *infiltrating cancer*.

## L

**lobe:** A portion of an organ such as the liver, lung, breast, or brain.

**lobular carcinoma in situ** (LOB-yoo-lar kar-sin-O-ma in SYE-too): LCIS. Abnormal cells found in the lobules (small lobes or subdivisions of a lobe) of the breast. This condition does not usually become invasive cancer. However, it does increase one's risk of developing breast cancer in either breast.

**local therapy:** Treatment that affects cells in the tumor and the area close to it.

**lumpectomy** (lump-EK-toe-mee): Surgery to remove the tumor and a small amount of normal tissue around it.

**lymph** (limf): The almost colorless fluid that travels through the lymphatic system and carries cells that help fight infection and disease.

**lymph node:** A round mass of lymphatic tissue that is surrounded by connective tissue. Also known as a lymph gland. Lymph nodes are spread out along lymphatic vessels and they contain many lymphocytes, which filter the lymphatic fluid (lymph).

**lymphatic system** (lim-FAT-ik): The tissues and organs that produce, store, and carry white blood cells. (White blood cells fight infection and other diseases.) This system includes the bone marrow, spleen, thymus, and lymph nodes and a network of thin tubes that carry lymph and white blood cells. These tubes branch, like blood vessels, into all the tissues of the body.

**lymphedema** (LIMF-eh-DEE-ma): A condition in which excess lymph collects in tissue and causes swelling. It may occur in the arm or leg after lymph vessels or lymph nodes are removed.

## M

**magnetic resonance imaging** (mag-NET-ik REZ-o-nans IM-a-jing) **MRI:** A procedure in which a special magnet linked to a computer is used to create detailed pictures of areas inside the body.

**malignant** (ma-LIG-nant): Cancerous; a growth that will invade and destroy nearby tissue and spread to other parts of the body.

**mammogram** (MAM-o-gram): An X ray of the breast.





**mammography** (mam-OG-ra-fee): An X ray study of the breast.

**mastectomy** (mas-TEK-toe-mee): Surgery to remove the breast.

**metastasis** (meh-TAS-ta-sis): The spread of cancer from one part of the body to another. Tumors formed from cells that have spread are called "secondary tumors" and contain cells that are like those in the original (primary) tumor. The plural is metastases.

**microcalcifications** (MY-krow-kal-si-fi-KAY-shunz): Tiny deposits of calcium in the breast that cannot be felt but can be detected on a mammogram. A cluster of these very small specks of calcium may indicate that cancer is present.

**modified radical mastectomy** (mas-TEK-toe-mee): Surgical procedure in which the breast, some of the lymph nodes in the armpit, and the lining over the chest muscles are removed.

## N

**neoadjuvant therapy**: Treatment given before the primary treatment with the aims of improving the results of that treatment and preventing the development of metastases. Neoadjuvant therapy can be chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or hormone therapy.

**nipple discharge**: Fluid coming from the nipple.

## O

**oncologist** (on-KOL-o-jist): A doctor who specializes in treating cancer.

## P

**palpation**: Examination by pressing on the surface of the body to feel the organs or tissues underneath.

**pathologist** (pa-THOL-o-jist): A doctor who identifies diseases by studying cells and tissues under a microscope.

**peripheral stem cell transplantation** (per-IF-er-al): A method of replacing blood-forming cells destroyed by cancer treatment. Immature blood cells (stem cells) in the circulating blood that are similar to those in the bone marrow are given to the person after treatment to help the bone marrow recover and continue producing healthy blood cells. Transplantation may be autologous (using the person's blood cells saved earlier), allogeneic (using blood cells donated by someone else), or syngeneic (using blood cells donated by an identical twin). Also called peripheral stem cell support.

**positron emission tomography scan**: PET scan. A computerized image of the metabolic activity of body tissues used to determine the presence of disease.

**prognosis** (prog-NO-sis): The likely outcome or course of a disease; the chance of recovery.



**prosthesis** (pros-THEE-sis): An artificial replacement of a part of the body.

## R

**radiation therapy** (ray-dee-AY-shun): The use of high-energy radiation from x-rays, neutrons, and other sources to kill cancer cells and shrink tumors. Radiation may come from a machine outside the body (external-beam radiation therapy) or from material called radioisotopes. Radioisotopes produce radiation and are placed in or near a tumor or near cancer cells. This type of radiation treatment is called internal radiation therapy, implant radiation, or brachytherapy. Systemic radiation therapy uses a radioactive substance, such as a radiolabeled monoclonal antibody, that circulates throughout the body. Also called radiotherapy.

**radical mastectomy** (RAD-ih-kal mas-TEK-toe-mee): Surgery to remove the breast, chest muscles, and all of the lymph nodes in the armpit. Also called the Halsted radical mastectomy.

**remission:** Disappearance of the signs and symptoms of cancer. When this happens, the disease is said to be "in remission." A remission may be temporary or permanent.

**risk factor:** Anything that increases the chance of developing a disease.

## S

**screening:** Checking for disease when there are no symptoms.

**segmental mastectomy** (mas-TEK-toe-mee): The removal of the cancer as well as some of the breast tissue around the tumor and the lining over the chest muscles below the tumor. Usually some of the lymph nodes under the arm are also taken out. Sometimes called partial mastectomy.

**sentinel lymph node biopsy:** Procedure in which a dye or radioactive substance is injected near the tumor. This material flows into the sentinel lymph nodes(s) (the first lymph node(s) that cancer is likely to spread to from the primary tumor). A surgeon then looks for the dye or uses a scanner to find the sentinel lymph node(s) and removes it in order to check for the presence of tumor cells.

**stage:** The extent of a cancer within the body, including whether the disease has spread from the original site to other parts of the body. Staging refers to the determination of the extent of cancer.

**surgery:** A procedure to remove or repair a part of the body or to find out if disease is present.

**systemic** (sis-TEM-ik): Affecting the entire body.

## T

**tissue** (TISH-oo): A group or layer of cells that together perform specific functions.

**total mastectomy** (mas-TEK-toe-mee): Removal of the breast. Also called simple mastectomy.

**tumor** (TOO-mer): An abnormal mass of tissue that results from excessive cell division. Tumors perform no useful body function. They may be either benign (not cancerous) or malignant (cancerous).



## U

**ultrasonography** (UL-tra-son-OG-ra-fee): A study in which sound waves (called ultrasound) are bounced off tissues and the echoes are converted into a picture (sonogram).

## X

**xenoestrogens**: substances that mimic the female hormone estrogen. As breast cancer is linked to estrogen, it is possible that chemicals mimicking an estrogen could affect breast cancer risk. (1)

**X ray**: High-energy radiation used in low doses to diagnose diseases and in high doses to treat cancer.

