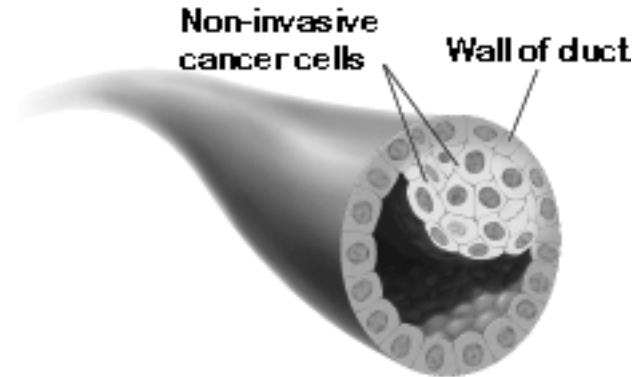


Breast Cancer Overview

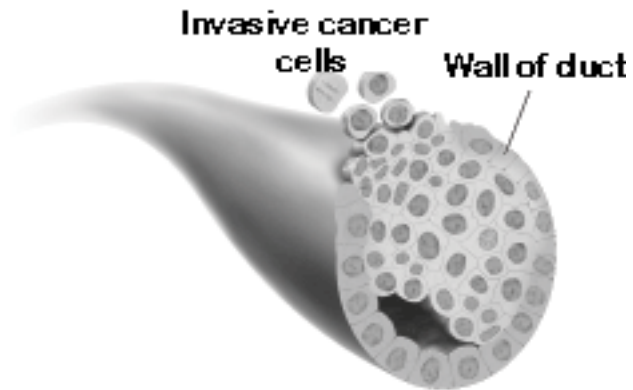
Cancer is defined as the abnormal growth and spread of cells in the body. *Breast cancer* is the uncontrolled growth and reproduction of abnormal cells in the breast. It is the most common type of cancer in women.



MICROSCOPIC CROSS SECTION OF BREAST DUCT: CARCINOMA IN SITU (SOURCE: NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE)

The most common type of breast cancer is *infiltrating ductal carcinoma* which is an invasive cancer. In this case, cancer cells invade the fatty tissue around the ducts and may invade other breast structures. The first place outside the breast where cancer cells are likely to be found is in the axillary lymph nodes under the arm. If cancer cells have spread from the breast to distant parts of the body, such as the lung, liver, brain or bone, this is called *metastasis*.

Breast cancer begins in either the ducts or the lobules of the breast and is called either *ductal* or *lobular carcinoma*. Breast cancer which is confined to these structures is known as *carcinoma in situ*. *Ductal carcinoma in situ* (DCIS) and *lobular carcinoma in situ* (LCIS) are non-invasive cancers confined to the site of origin. Unlike DCIS, LCIS is **not** considered a true cancer and is sometimes called a “marker.” It is an indication of raised risk for development of invasive cancer in either breast. This may not happen for 20 years, if ever.



MICROSCOPIC CROSS SECTION OF BREAST DUCT: INVASIVE CANCER (SOURCE: NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE)

Less common types of breast cancer include:

- *Paget's disease* (a form of breast cancer that occurs in the nipple and usually starts with scaling, oozing, or hardening of the skin of the nipple or areola.)
- *Inflammatory breast cancer* (a rare and relatively fast-growing cancer that causes redness and swelling of the breast that looks like an infection.)

Breast cancer is classified by stage. The stage is based on:

- tumor size
- presence or absence of cancer cells in the lymph nodes
- presence or absence of cancer cells in other parts of the body

Stage determines prognosis and influences treatment planning.

STAGING

- STAGE O** Carcinoma in situ.
- STAGE I** The cancer is no larger than 2 centimeters and has not spread outside the breast.
- STAGE II** The cancer is no larger than 2 centimeters and has spread to the lymph nodes under the arm.
- OR**
- The cancer is 2 – 5 centimeters. It may have spread to the lymph nodes under the arm.
- OR**
- The cancer is larger than 5 centimeters, but has not spread to the lymph nodes under the arm.
- STAGE III** The cancer is 5 centimeters or larger and has spread to the lymph nodes under the arm.
- OR**
- The cancer is 5 centimeters or larger and has spread to the nearby tissues such as the skin, chest muscles, ribs or lymph nodes along the breastbone.
- OR**
- The cancer has spread locally to the skin and lymph nodes inside the neck, near the collarbone or the cancer is any size with fixed or matted axillary nodes.
- STAGE IV** The cancer has spread to other parts of the body such as the bones, lungs, liver or brain.