Understanding Inflammatory Breast Cancer (IBC)

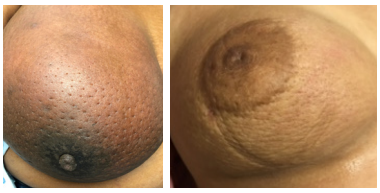
- Inflammatory breast cancer (also called IBC) is an **aggressive form of locally advanced breast cancer.**
- Unlike other breast cancers, **IBC usually lacks a lump.** The main warning signs of IBC are breast swelling and skin changes like redness.
- **IBC comes on quickly, sometimes in a matter of weeks.** See a health care provider right away if you notice any changes in your breast or underarm area.

Signs and Symptoms of IBC

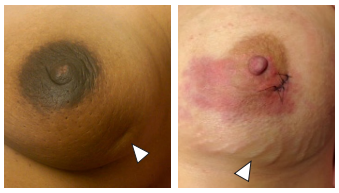
Skin changes associated with IBC may be more or less severe than the examples shown below and may appear differently in each individual.

SKIN CHANGES

Peau d'orange (orange peel-like appearance)



Breast skin thickening, ridging or dimpling



Redness of the breast (may also be pinkish or purplish tone)

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS NOT PICTURED

- Appears and may worsen rapidly (within weeks to months)
- Breast pain, itching, warm to the touch
- Swollen lymph nodes near armpit and/or collarbone

NIPPLE CHANGES

Nipple flattening

Nipple inversion or retraction

Crusting of nipple skin or areola

BREAST SWELLING

Breast enlargement (may feel heavy)

Images from Jagsi R. et al. Breast Cancer Res Treat. 2022[1]

An Online Tool is Available to Help Your Health Care Provider Identify IBC

The IBC Scoring System is designed to help health care providers recognize and effectively diagnose IBC. Tell your provider about this tool and talk about your results together.

Use the IBC Scoring System Online Tool at komen.org/ibc-calc

The IBC Scoring System was developed by the Susan G. Komen-IBCRF IBC Collaborative in Partnership with the Milburn Foundation.

If You Have Signs of IBC...

Don't delay! Schedule an appointment with your provider to talk about any signs and symptoms you're having. You may be referred to a breast specialist.

Document any changes in your breasts or overall health to share with your provider.

At the appointment:

- **Ask** about a diagnostic mammogram and ultrasound since IBC can be difficult to detect with traditional mammography[2].
- **Share Komen's Clinician's Guide to IBC** with your provider.
- **Share** the **IBC Scoring System Online Tool with** your provider.

IBC OR MASTITIS? KNOW THE DIFFERENCES

Inflammatory Breast Cancer

- Symptoms persist or get worse with antibiotics
- Only 1-5% of breast cancers are IBC
- Biopsy is needed for diagnosis
- Nipple changes (flattening, inversion, crusting)

Breast Infection (mastitis)

- Symptoms get better with antibiotics
- Common in breastfeeding mothers
- Flu-like symptoms (fever, chills, etc.)
- Nipple discharge

Quickly Ruling Out an Infection Can Save Your Life

The signs and symptoms of IBC often look like mastitis (an infection of the breast). Therefore, it's common for health care providers to first prescribe antibiotics to rule out an infection. **If you're prescribed antibiotics and your breast symptoms do not get better within 2 weeks (or if they get worse), act quickly and talk with your health care provider about IBC and any testing you may need[3].**

Inflammatory Breast Cancer is Treatable with Guideline-based Care

Treatment guidelines by the National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) recommend that patients diagnosed with stage 3 IBC (and in some cases stage 4, when cancer has spread beyond the breast tissue) receive trimodal (or trimodality) therapy[4] consisting of the following therapies in this order:

1. **Systemic therapy to shrink the tumor.** This can include chemotherapy, receptor targeted therapies, immunotherapy, or a combination of these treatments.
2. **Modified radical mastectomy with axillary lymph node dissection** (surgery) to remove the entire breast, lining of the chest muscles and axillary lymph nodes (lymph nodes in the underarm area).
3. **Post-mastectomy radiation therapy** (PMRT) to get rid of any remaining cancer cells in the chest wall and nearby lymph nodes.

To reduce the risk of complications, people with IBC should not receive breast reconstruction until guideline-based care is completed[4].

IF YOU'VE BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH IBC, THERE'S HOPE.
Guideline-based care for IBC can improve survival. There are clinical trials studying new ways to treat breast cancer. Talk with your provider about whether there are options for joining a clinical trial.

Be Your Own Advocate

IBC progresses rapidly; therefore, if you're diagnosed with IBC, it's critical to take an active role in your care and treatment plan.

Ways you can advocate for yourself:

- Look for a care team you trust that's experienced in treating IBC.
- Ask questions, gather information and **get a second opinion** if needed.
- Don't delay. Start treatment as soon as possible.
- Ensure you receive guideline-based care for IBC[4].

Learn More:

- Komen.org/ibc
- NCCN Guidelines for Patients: Inflammatory Breast Cancer

REFERENCES

1. Jagsi R. et al. Breast Cancer Res Treat. 2022. 2. Taghian A and Merajver SD. Inflammatory breast cancer: Clinical features and treatment. In: UpToDate (Hayes DF, Pierce LJ, Chagpar AB, Vora SR, eds.). Waltham, MA: UpToDate, 2024. 3. American Cancer Society. Types of Breast Cancer: Inflammatory Breast Cancer. 2023. 4. NCCN Guidelines for Patients. Inflammatory Breast Cancer, 2023.