

Where can breast cancer recur?

- Local recurrence is breast cancer that recurs at the original site in the breast, chest wall or the lymph nodes in the underarm area.
- Distant recurrence (called **metastasis**) is breast cancer that recurs and spreads to other parts of the body. It's also called stage 4 or metastatic breast cancer.

The most common sites of breast cancer metastasis are the bones, lungs, liver and brain. While invasive lobular cancer (ILC) can metastasize to these sites, it can also spread to sites not common with other breast cancers. For example, ILC sometimes may metastasize to the ovaries or the gastrointestinal tract (including the stomach, colon and rectum).

Everyone who's had breast cancer is at risk of **recurrence** (when breast cancer is found after treatment). However, most people with breast cancer will never have a recurrence. The risk of recurrence varies from person to person so talk with your doctor about your risk. Recurrence depends on many things including:

- The **biology of the tumor**, including biomarkers (such as hormone receptor and HER2 status).
- The **stage** of cancer at the time of the original diagnosis.
- The **treatments** for the original cancer.
- The **tumor profiling** score, for hormone receptor-positive tumors.



What if I have a recurrence?

Many people say facing breast cancer the first time around was one of the hardest things they've ever done. If you have a recurrence, you may wonder if you have the strength to go through it all again. It's normal to feel this way. You may also have similar emotions to when you were first diagnosed.

While it may be hard at times, try not to lose hope. Think about what brings meaning to your life and the things that help you cope, and do them as much as you can. Talk with your family and friends about the types of support you need. Make a plan with your doctor to treat the cancer and try to be open about how you're feeling.

Remember a breast cancer recurrence is not your fault. You did nothing to cause it.

How is a recurrence found?

- Local recurrence is usually found on a **mammogram**, during a physical exam by a doctor or when you notice a change from normal.
- Metastasis is usually found when you notice new and persistent signs or symptoms and report them to your doctor.

These may include:

- Fatigue.
- Shortness of breath.
- Weight loss.
- Bone pain.
- Seizures.
- Yellowing of the skin or whites of the eyes (jaundice).

It's normal to be concerned if you have signs or symptoms like fatigue, weight change or bone pain. These are common problems for many people. Most often, they don't mean the breast cancer has spread. For example, bone pain may be a sign of arthritis. Discuss any signs or symptoms you have (especially if they last more than 2 weeks) with your doctor to find out the cause.

This fact sheet is intended to be a brief overview. For more information, visit komen.org or call the Komen Patient Care Center's Breast Care Helpline at 1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636) Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. ET and Friday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. ET or email at helpline@komen.org. Se habla español.

Resources

Susan G. Komen®
1-877 GO KOMEN
(1-877-465-6636)
[komen.org](https://www.komen.org)

Related online resources:

- [After Early Breast Cancer – Signs and Symptoms of Metastatic Breast Cancer](#)
- [Metastatic Breast Cancer – What Is It?](#)
- [Support After a Breast Cancer Diagnosis](#)

A new treatment plan

Learn as much as you can

Find out as much as you can about your breast cancer. The location and biology of the tumor help guide your treatment options. They may be different from your first breast cancer.

Don't face this alone

There may be hard choices to make. A family member or friend can help you weigh your options. Ask them to take notes at doctor appointments, gather paperwork and talk through your treatment options with you.

Pick your medical team

You may want to use the same medical team you had before. However, it's always OK to get a [second opinion](#). Another doctor may have a different insight about your diagnosis and treatment options or confirm the original diagnosis and plan of care. By getting a second opinion you may have more options for care. Or you may find a doctor you relate to better.

Decide your treatment goals

The location and extent of the recurrence will affect your treatment goals. If you have a local recurrence, your treatment will aim to get rid of the cancer with some combination of

- surgery,
- chemotherapy, hormone therapy, HER2-targeted therapy or other drug therapies and/or
- radiation therapy (if it wasn't part of your initial treatment).

If you have metastatic breast cancer, tests will be done to see which organs are involved and to learn more about the tumor. This will inform your treatment options. Talk with your doctor about your treatment goals.

Second primary tumor

A second primary breast tumor is a new breast cancer, it's not related to your first breast cancer. Treatment is planned the same way treatment for a recurrence is planned.

You're not alone

If you're facing a breast cancer recurrence, you're not alone. Many people have been where you are today. They had the same fears and worries, and they faced the same tough choices.

While it may be hard, try to maintain your routine as much as you can. Do things you enjoy. Talk to others about how you are feeling and how they can help. Find a support group. Social support can help reduce anxiety and stress, depression and fatigue.

Find more information on finding a support group [here](#).

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