

Types of Breast Cancer Tumors

What are the types of breast cancer tumors?

While breast cancer is often referred to as one disease, there are many types of breast cancer. All breast cancers start in the breast, so they are alike in some ways, but they differ in others.

Non-invasive and invasive breast cancer

Ductal carcinoma in situ

Ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS) is a non-invasive breast cancer (also called stage 0). “In situ” [in SY-too] means “in place.” With DCIS, the abnormal cells are contained in the milk ducts of the breast and have not spread into the surrounding breast tissue.

Invasive breast cancer

Invasive breast cancer has spread from the original site (either the milk ducts or the lobules) into the surrounding breast tissue. It may have spread to the lymph nodes and/or other parts of the body.

Types of invasive breast cancer

The most common type of invasive breast cancer is invasive ductal carcinoma. It starts in the ducts of the breast (the tubes that carry breast milk to the nipple). Invasive lobular carcinoma is the next most common type. It occurs in the lobules (the sacs in the breast that produce milk).

There are less common types of invasive breast cancer that tend to have a good prognosis (outcome). They are:

- Mucinous (colloid) carcinoma,
- Papillary carcinoma, and
- Tubular carcinoma.



Special forms of invasive breast cancer

Though they are not specific types of tumors, inflammatory breast cancer, Paget disease of the breast and metaplastic breast cancer are other forms of breast cancer.

Inflammatory breast cancer (IBC) is a rare, but aggressive form of breast cancer. Its main symptoms are swelling and redness of the breast. It accounts for about one to five percent of all breast cancers. With other forms of breast cancer, symptoms may not occur for years. But, with IBC, symptoms tend to occur within weeks or months. Report any of these symptoms to your doctor:

- Swelling or enlargement of the breast
- Redness of the breast (may also be a pinkish or purplish tone)
- Dimpling or puckering of the skin of the breast
- Pulling in of the nipple
- Breast pain
- Although a lump may be felt, it is less common with IBC than with other breast cancers

Some symptoms can be mistaken for a breast infection. IBC is often diagnosed after symptoms do not improve with antibiotics. If you have these symptoms and they last longer than a week on antibiotics, tell your doctor. Don't be afraid to get a second opinion.

Paget disease of the breast is a rare breast cancer that appears in the skin of the nipple or skin around the nipple. Report any of these symptoms to your doctor:

- Itching, burning, redness and scaling of the skin on the nipple and areola
- Bloody discharge from the nipple
- Nipple flattened against the breast

It may be found with an underlying breast cancer. The tumor may grow from underneath the nipple and break out onto the skin of the nipple. About one to three percent of breast cancers are Paget disease of the breast.

Metaplastic breast cancer is rare and accounts for fewer than five percent of all invasive breast cancers. These tumors tend to be larger than other common types of breast cancer. Because metaplastic tumor cells have many forms, these cancers can be hard to diagnose and are often confused with other uncommon breast tumors.

Related fact sheets in this series:

- Breast Cancer Prognosis
- Ductal Carcinoma in Situ
- Inflammatory Breast Cancer
- Metastatic Breast Cancer
- Paget Disease of the Breast
- What is Breast Cancer?