

Inflammatory Breast Cancer FAQ



Q. What Is IBC?

Inflammatory breast cancer (IBC) is a rare form of breast cancer that blocks the lymph vessels in the breast. This causes the breast to look swollen or inflamed. IBC is not an inflammation caused by an infection, though, and does not respond to antibiotics. Symptoms develop quickly over a few weeks. Unlike other forms of breast cancer, usually no lump will be present. The surface of the breast may look like the skin of an orange, and the nipple may be inverted. Swollen lymph nodes under the armpit are often present.

Q. Who Is at Risk?

- A. Among the estimated 182,000 women diagnosed with invasive breast cancer each year in the United States, about 1% to 5% will have IBC. Women with IBC are usually younger than those diagnosed with other forms of breast cancer. IBC risk is greater for African American compared with white women. It is unclear whether IBC risk is higher in women with a family history of breast cancer.

Q. What Is the Prognosis?

- A. IBC is an aggressive form of cancer. The number of IBC patients alive at 5 years is 40% to 50% compared with more than 60% for similar patients with other forms of advanced breast cancer. However, these are averages based on large numbers of patients, so they cannot be used to predict outcome in a given patient.

Q. How Is IBC Diagnosed?

- A. The diagnosis of IBC is confirmed with a biopsy, in which small pieces of breast tissue are looked at under a microscope. Imaging methods such as a mammogram, ultrasound, CT scan, and/or MRI are used to diagnose the cancer and to determine the stage. This information helps the doctor determine the best treatment approaches to use.

Q. How Is IBC Treated?

- A. IBC used to be treated in the same way as any other type of advanced breast cancer. Recently, researchers have come to understand more about IBC and the best ways to treat it. The most common form of treatment for IBC involves multiple therapy approaches. These include chemotherapy, radiation therapy, hormonal therapy, targeted therapy, and surgery. Typically, chemotherapy is given first, before other forms of treatment.

Other Resources

Susan G. Komen for the Cure:

<http://cms.komen.org/komen/AboutBreastCancer/TheABCsofBreastCancerGuide>

National Cancer Institute:

<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Sites-Types/IBC>

Inflammatory Breast Cancer Research Foundation:

<http://www.ibcresearch.org>

University of Michigan Inflammatory Breast Cancer Clinic:

http://www.cancer.med.umich.edu/cancertreat/breast/the_ibc_clinic.shtml

Inflammatory Breast Cancer Association:

<http://www.ibchelp.org>