

What is triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC)?

TNBC (triple-negative breast cancer) is a type of breast cancer where cells lack estrogen receptors, progesterone receptors, and HER2 receptors (or presence of excess amounts of it). That is what makes it “triple-negative.”¹

Treatments that work for other types of breast cancer that have those receptors may not be an option for people with TNBC.¹

Who does TNBC affect the most?

TNBC can affect anyone but is more common in women who:¹

- are younger than 40
- are of African descent, or
- have a mutation (change) in their *BRCA1* genes

Genes are pieces of DNA inside each cell that tell the cell how to make the proteins it needs to function.² The *BRCA1* gene and *BRCA2* genes normally help to suppress cell growth, but if there is an abnormal change to how it is developing, it could increase the risk of getting certain types of cancers.¹

What are the stages of TNBC?

STAGE 1

This is the earliest stage of invasive breast cancer. Invasive means the cancer has grown or spread into nearby or surrounding breast tissue.³

STAGE 2

The tumour may have grown up to 5 cm (about the size of a lime) or larger. Cancer may or may not start to appear in the lymph nodes.³

STAGE 3

The tumour may be larger than stage 2 and may have spread to lymph nodes or tissue around the breast.³

STAGE 4

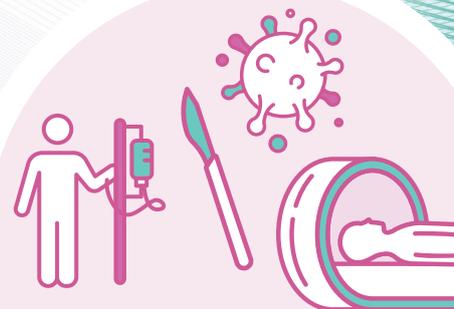
Cancer has spread beyond the breast and nearby lymph nodes to other parts of the body.³

Living with TNBC

There is a lot to consider about cancer treatment. And you may have more questions than answers. Remember that your health care team is there to help you. But if you're not getting the answers you need, keep asking questions. This is your body and your life and you should feel free to address any concerns.

What may be my treatment options?

- Surgery¹
- Radiation therapy (also called radiotherapy)¹
- Chemotherapy (also called chemo)¹
- Immunotherapy¹
- Targeted therapy¹



Preparing for treatment

You may have heard that TNBC is “hard to treat.” But there are treatment options out there, and there is no reason to give up hope. If you or someone you love has recently been diagnosed with TNBC, ask your doctor to explain the next steps. If you’re not sure how to start the conversation, these questions may help:

- ? Do I need treatment right away?
- ? What are the different options for my treatment, and what do you recommend?
- ? Where can I learn more about these treatments? Is there anyone else I should talk to?
- ? How will my cancer and treatment affect my daily life? Will I be able to work, exercise, and do my normal activities?
- ? What types of support can help me prepare for what’s ahead?

Who may be on my care team?

- **Oncologist:** A doctor who treats cancer with medicines⁴
- **Radiation oncologist:** A doctor who treats cancer with radiation⁴
- **Oncology nurse:** A nurse who works with patients with cancer⁴
- **Social worker:** Someone who can provide support and resources to help you cope with cancer⁴
- **Pharmacist:** A professional who can fill prescription medications and provide information about how to take medications, possible drug interactions, and ways to stay on schedule.⁴

Patient support

It may be helpful for you to have a person that can guide you through the health care system. There are also staff members at the local cancer community organisations who may be able to help.

They can help you:⁵

- prepare questions to ask your doctor
- connect you with support inside and outside of your cancer care facility
- offer guidance about work issues
- offer guidance and navigation about insurance matters
- talk to local community-based services that can assist with issues such as transportation, childcare or medical bills



Your emotional health is important too.⁶

Ask a member of your health care team about mental health or emotional well-being resources, such as therapy or patient support groups.⁶



It’s okay to ask for help.

It’s your body and it needs your voice.



You are the most important member of your health care team. Talk about what is important to you, so your health care team knows what you need.

It’s your experience. It’s your life. Treatment options and care instructions can be overwhelming. Ask as many questions as you need to. Ask for information to be repeated. It’s your health.

References: 1. American Cancer Society. About Breast Cancer. Available from <https://www.cancer.org/content/dam/CRC/PDF/Public/8577.00.pdf> [Accessed 6 November 2024]. 2. American Cancer Society. Genes and Cancer. Available from <https://www.cancer.org/content/dam/CRC/PDF/Public/6647.00.pdf> [Accessed 6 November 2024]. 3. Breast Cancer Research Foundation. Breast Cancer Stages and What They Mean. 10 September 2024. Available from <https://www.bcrf.org/blog/breast-cancer-stages/> [Accessed 6 November 2024]. 4. CancerCare. Your Health Care Team: Understanding Their Roles. Available from <https://media.cancercare.org/publications/original/59/2024-Your-Health-Care-Team-Understanding-Their-Roles.pdf> [Accessed 6 November 2024]. 5. National Cancer Institute. Definition of patient navigator. Available from <https://www.cancer.gov/publications/dictionaries/cancer-terms/def/patient-navigator> [Accessed 6 November 2024]. 6. American Cancer Society. Psychosocial Support Options for People with Cancer. Available from <https://www.cancer.org/content/dam/CRC/PDF/Public/6712.00.pdf> [Accessed 6 November 2024].

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