

PATIENT'S GUIDE THROUGH THE METASTATIC BREAST CANCER JOURNEY

Understanding the disease and its treatment options can help guide breast cancer patients through their cancer journey. This patient journey guide outlines the common milestones and treatment considerations for patients with metastatic breast cancer (mBC).

This is not a substitute for medical advice. Please see your treating oncologist for all questions you may have.

BEGIN

1. Suspicious Finding/Occurrence of a New Symptom

- Previously diagnosed with breast cancer (recurrent)
- Not previously diagnosed with breast cancer (new)

2. Diagnostic Workup

- Imaging (mammogram, ultrasound, MRI, CT, PET, bone scan, etc)¹
- Genetic or hereditary testing
Recommended if patient has a personal/family history of breast cancer or has triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC)^{2,3}
- Tissue biopsy (human receptor [HR] and human epidermal growth factor receptor 2 [HER2] status, testing of tumor proteins)¹

Questions for Patient's Health Care Team

- What is a biopsy?
- Why do I need a biopsy?
- What should I expect before, during, and after the biopsy procedure?
- Why do I need genetic testing?
- Which family members should I share my genetic testing results with?
- Is genetic testing covered by my insurance, or is financial assistance available?
- Can I be denied insurance coverage in the future if I have hereditary breast cancer?
- Why do the proteins on tumors need to be tested, and what will that information mean?

3. Staging¹ Staging and diagnostic workup will help determine the appropriate treatment options

- Considers tumor size, cancer spreading to lymph nodes or to other parts of the body, physical exam findings, tumor proteins and imaging results, and tumor characteristics

T (tumor) – Depth and spread of the main tumor(s) in one or both breasts

N (node) – If cancer has spread to nearby lymph nodes

M (metastasis) – If cancer has spread to other parts of the body

Questions for Patient's Health Care Team:

- What is my stage and type of breast cancer?
- Is treatment available for my stage and type of breast cancer?
- Is my breast cancer hereditary?
- Are my children now at a higher risk of having breast cancer?

4. Multidisciplinary Team Involvement¹

- The multidisciplinary approach to mBC management involves several team members with different specialties

Questions for Patient's Health Care Team:

- Who will be involved in my cancer care?
- If I've had breast cancer before, will I have the same care team as my first diagnosis?

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5. mBC Treatment Options¹

- a. Local therapy
 - i. Surgery (in rare cases)
 - ii. Palliative radiation
 - iii. Ovarian ablation therapy
- b. Systemic therapy
 - i. Targeted therapy
 - ii. Inhibitors
 - iii. Chemotherapy
 - iv. Endocrine therapy
 - v. Immunotherapy
 - vi. Bone-targeted therapy
- c. Clinical trials
- d. Medical supportive care for breast cancer-related symptoms
 - i. Fatigue, bone/joint health, lymphedema, anxiety/depression, sleep difficulties

Questions for Patient's Health Care Team:

- Will I receive a treatment plan?
- Would a clinical trial be appropriate for me?
- What are the expected treatment side effects?
- What should I report to the care team?

Report at next oncology visit: Any new or worsening symptoms and side effects

Call healthcare team: Any symptoms that cause concern

Call 911 or visit ER: Fever of 100.4 degrees or higher, shortness of breath, severe pain or dizziness

- How am I going to afford care? Will insurance cover it?
- Can I do normal activities during treatment?

6. Patient Support^{4,5}

- a. Financial
- b. Psychosocial
- c. Sexual health
- d. Social work
- e. Nutrition
- f. Physical activity/oncology rehabilitation
- g. Immunizations
- h. Genetic counseling
- i. Spiritual

Patient Considerations:

- Who can provide me with emotional support?
- Do you have any support groups?

7. Follow-Up Visits and Tests to Evaluate Treatment Response and Tolerability¹

- a. Physical exams, blood tests, imaging, tumor testing

Questions for Patient's Health Care Team:

- How often are my follow-ups, and why should I maintain them?
- How will communication between my oncologist and primary care doctor happen?
- What side effects or symptoms should I expect?
- How do I manage side effects?
- What side effects do I need to report to my care team?

8. Hospice/End-of-Life Care⁶

- a. Appropriate when life expectancy is 6 months or less

Questions for Patient's Health Care Team:

- What is the difference between palliative and hospice care?
- May I get hospice care at home?
- Will I be comfortable?
- Are these services covered by insurance?
- What should my family and I expect during the dying process?
- What legal paperwork do I need to complete?



For more resources,
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References

1. National Comprehensive Cancer Network. NCCN Guidelines—metastatic breast cancer guidelines for patients, 2024. Accessed December 17, 2024. www.nccn.org/patientresources/patient-resources/guidelines-for-patients/guidelines-for-patients-details?patientGuidelineId=22
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6. National Cancer Institute. End-of-life care for people who have cancer. Updated June 28, 2021. Accessed December 17, 2024. www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/advanced-cancer/care-choices/care-fact-sheet



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