

## What is inflammatory breast cancer?

Inflammatory breast cancer (IBC) is the most aggressive form of breast cancer. It is called inflammatory breast cancer because its main symptoms are swelling and redness of the breast. It is a less common form of invasive ductal cancer. Unlike other forms of breast cancer, IBC often lacks a distinct lump or tumor. Instead, it grows in nests or sheets that spread through the breast. IBC is not usually detected by mammograms or ultrasounds unless there is a defined lump. If no lump is present, it can be hard to diagnose. Because IBC cells spread easily to other parts of the body, it requires prompt diagnosis and treatment.

## Who is at risk?

IBC accounts for about one to six percent of new cases of breast cancer.

- It is slightly more common in African American women. As many as ten percent of new breast cancer cases in African American women are IBC, compared to six percent of breast cancer cases in Caucasians and five percent in women of other races.
- It is more common in younger women than other forms of breast cancer. It has been seen in women who are pregnant and in women who are breastfeeding.
- Like other forms of breast cancer, it has been seen in men.

## Symptoms of inflammatory breast cancer

There are many symptoms of inflammatory breast cancer. It is important to see your doctor if you have any of these symptoms:

- one breast becomes much larger than the other one (often sudden)
- warmth and swelling in the breast (often sudden)
- redness or pinkness that may look like an infection
- itching or pain in the breast that won't go away
- dimpling of the skin that may look like the skin of an orange (called peau d' orange)
- ridges or thickened areas of skin
- nipple discharge
- nipple retraction or flattening
- change in the color of the areola (the dark skin around the nipple)
- a bruise that does not go away
- swollen lymph nodes on the neck or under the arm
- a lump (although often there is no lump)



*Enlarged right breast with nipple retraction. Peau d' orange on underside of breast not visible in the photo above is shown in the next photo.*



Photos courtesy the Inflammatory Breast Cancer Research Foundation

*Peau d'orange on underside of breast, not visible when standing. The small irregular red spot at the 11 o'clock position in this photo is the scar remaining from a skin biopsy, not a symptom of inflammatory breast cancer.*

The symptoms of IBC are not always the same. It is often misdiagnosed as a breast infection. Any of these symptoms may be a sign of either IBC or a benign breast infection (not cancer). If the symptoms last longer than a week after starting antibiotics, insist that your doctor do a biopsy to see if cancer cells are present. If you do not feel that your doctor listens to your concerns, get a second opinion.

## Treatment for inflammatory breast cancer

Treatment for inflammatory breast cancer often starts with several rounds of a systemic treatment like chemotherapy, hormone therapy or both. These treatments affect the whole body. They are used to kill or control any cancer cells that might have spread to other parts of the body. Then local treatments, such as radiation therapy and surgery, are used to target the remaining cancer cells in the breast and under the arm. Sometimes systemic treatments are used again after the local treatments. Systemic treatments used at follow-up may include chemotherapy, hormone therapy and biological therapy.

*This list of resources is made available solely as a suggested resource. Please note that it is not a complete listing of materials or information available on breast health and breast cancer. This information is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or to replace the services of a medical professional. Further, the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation does not endorse, recommend or make any warranties or representations regarding the accuracy, completeness, timeliness, quality or non-infringement of any of the materials, products or information provided by the organizations referred to in this list.*

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If you have been diagnosed with inflammatory breast cancer, know that there is hope. Advances in the treatment of breast cancer have improved the five-year survival rates of women with IBC. Recent studies have shown as much as a 50 percent survival rate after five years and a 35 percent survival rate after ten years. Relapses after ten years are rare and new research is always going on. Staying positive is vital to your quality of life. Ask your doctor about sources of help and support in your area.

## Resources

### Organizations

American Cancer Society  
1.800.ACS.2345  
[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

IBC Research Foundation  
1.877.STOP.IBC  
[www.ibcresearch.org](http://www.ibcresearch.org)

National Cancer Institute  
1.800.4CANCER  
[www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation  
1.800 I'M AWARE®  
[www.komen.org](http://www.komen.org)

### Internet

IBC Support  
[www.ibcsupport.org](http://www.ibcsupport.org)

### Related fact sheets in this series:

- biopsy
- what is breast cancer
- types of breast cancer
- treatment choices — an overview