

## **Breast Cancer - Inflammatory - Overview** [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 08/2014

**ON THIS PAGE:** You will find some basic information about this disease and the parts of the body it may affect. This is the first page of Cancer.Net's Guide to Inflammatory Breast Cancer. To see other pages, use the menu on the side of your screen. Think of that menu as a roadmap to this full guide.

Inflammatory breast cancer is a rare form of breast cancer. The cancer gets its name because the symptoms include redness, tenderness, swelling, and pain in the breast, all of which are similar to a condition called mastitis that is an inflammation of the breast. However, unlike mastitis, inflammatory breast cancer does not improve with antibiotic treatment.

### **About the breast**

The breast is mainly composed of fatty tissue. Within this tissue is a network of lobes, which are made up of tiny, tube-like structures called lobules that contain milk glands. Tiny ducts connect the glands, lobules, and lobes, carrying the milk from the lobes to the nipple, located in the middle of the areola, which is the darker area that surrounds the nipple of the breast. Blood and lymph vessels run throughout the breast; blood nourishes the cells, and the lymph system collects fluid from tissues to return to the blood and carries cells that help fight infection and disease. The lymph vessels connect to lymph nodes, the tiny, bean-shaped organs that help fight infection.

### **About cancer**

Cancer begins when normal cells in the breast change and grow uncontrollably, forming a mass called a tumor. A tumor can be benign or cancerous. A benign tumor means the tumor will not spread. A cancerous tumor is malignant, meaning it can spread to other parts of the body. Breast cancer spreads when the cancer grows into other parts of the body or when breast cancer cells move to other parts of the body through the blood vessels and/or lymph vessels. This is called metastatic cancer.

In inflammatory breast cancer, the cancer cells block the lymph vessels within the breast, which causes fluid backup and swelling of the breast and overlying skin. Because this type of breast cancer can grow quickly, it is treated with a combination of surgery, radiation therapy, and chemotherapy; see [Treatment Options](#) [3] for more information.

## Looking for More of an Overview?

If you would like additional introductory information about breast cancer, explore these related items. Please note these links take you to other sections on Cancer.Net:

- [ASCO Answers Fact Sheet](#) [4]: Read a one-page fact sheet (available as a PDF) that offers an easy-to-print introduction to breast cancer.
- [ASCO Answers Guide](#) [5]: This 52-page booklet (available as a PDF) helps newly diagnosed patients better understand their disease and treatment options, as well as keep track of the specifics of their individual cancer care plan.
- [Cancer.Net Patient Education Video](#) [6]: View a short video led by an ASCO expert in breast cancer that provides basic information and areas of research.

*To continue reading this guide, use the menu on the side of your screen to select another section.*

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### Links:

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/breast-cancer-inflammatory/overview>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/18583>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25327>

[5] [http://www.cancer.net/sites/cancer.net/files/asco\\_answers\\_guide\\_breast.pdf](http://www.cancer.net/sites/cancer.net/files/asco_answers_guide_breast.pdf)

[6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/29046>