

Study Suggests that Women with BRCA Mutations and Triple-Negative Breast Cancer Live Longer

In a recent study, researchers found that women with triple-negative breast cancer who also have a mutation (change) in a breast cancer gene (*BRCA1* or *BRCA2*) are less likely to have a recurrence or die of breast cancer than women with this type of cancer who do not have a *BRCA* mutation. Triple-negative breast cancer is a fast-growing and difficult-to-treat cancer that does not have hormone receptors (for the hormones estrogen and/or progesterone) or HER2 receptors (a protein found on some breast tumors). This means that the cancer does not use estrogen, progesterone, or HER2 to grow and cannot be treated with hormonal therapy or treatments that block HER2.

In this small study of 77 women, researchers wanted to know how common *BRCA* gene mutations are for women with triple-negative breast cancer and whether these mutations affect risk of recurrence and long-term survival. They found that almost 20% of women with triple-negative breast cancer also had mutations in a *BRCA* gene. Then, the researchers estimated that about 48% of the women in this study without a *BRCA* mutation will have the cancer return within 5 years after diagnosis, compared with about 14% of the women with a *BRCA* mutation. Researchers also estimated that about 53% of the patients without a *BRCA* mutation will live at least 5 years after diagnosis, compared with about 73% of the women with a *BRCA* mutation.

What this means for patients

“We’ve known that women with *BRCA* mutations have a high rate of triple-negative breast cancer, and it’s not surprising that women with triple-negative cancer have more *BRCA* mutations,” said lead author Ana Maria Gonzalez-Angulo, MD, Associate Professor of Breast Medical Oncology at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston. “But, it is surprising that there’s such a difference in survival, and it’s not clear why.” Talk with your doctor about whether genetic testing for a *BRCA* mutation is appropriate based on your risk of breast cancer, and ask how the results could affect your prognosis and treatment.

What to ask your doctor

- What type of breast cancer do I have?
- What is the stage? What does this mean?
- What is the hormone and HER2 status? What does this mean?
- Do you recommend genetic testing to look for a *BRCA* mutation?
- What is my prognosis (chance of recovery)?
- What are my treatment options?
- What treatment do you recommend?
- If I have a *BRCA* mutation, how would this affect my treatment options?

For More Information

[Guide to Breast Cancer](#) [1]

[Hereditary Breast and Ovarian Cancer](#) [2]

[The Genetics of Breast Cancer](#) [3]

[What to Know: The ASCO and CAP Guideline on Estrogen and Progesterone Receptor Testing for Breast Cancer](#) [4]

[What to Know: ASCO's Guideline on HER2 Testing for Breast Cancer](#) [5]

Links:

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/node/18618>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/node/18922>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24896>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25786>

[5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25671>