

# **METASTATIC BREAST CANCER (MBC)**

Information for Patients/Guardians



## What is Metastatic Breast Cancer?

Metastatic Breast Cancer (MBC), also known as Stage IV breast cancer, is an advanced stage of cancer that has spread outside of the breast and armpit to other organs such as the bones, liver, lungs, or brain. This process of spreading is called metastasis. Although the cancer has invaded another organ, it is still classified and treated as breast cancer.

## What is the difference between early breast cancer (EBC) and MBC?

EBC is potentially curable, whereas MBC is treatable but no longer curable. Treatment for MBC is lifelong and focuses on preventing further spread of the disease and managing symptoms.

Who gets Metastatic Breast Cancer?

- Anyone with breast cancer can progress to metastatic disease if left untreated.
- A patient may develop a metastatic recurrence even months or years after complete treatment.
- Some women have metastatic disease at the time of their initial diagnosis of cancer.

## Why does cancer metastasize despite treatment?

The answer is not entirely clear, and researchers cannot accurately predict who will develop metastatic disease. However, if your doctor suspects metastatic recurrence, appropriate tests will be requested, and treatment will be initiated.

## What is the goal of treatment for MBC?

The goal is for patients to live productive and comfortable lives for as long as possible. Any treatment for metastatic breast cancer does not lead to a complete cure, nor can it guarantee against disease progression or worsening.

## How is MBC treated?

There are many kinds of MBC, and treatment choices are highly personalised. Together with your doctor, you can find the balance of treatment and quality of life that is right for you. Your treatment plan is guided by many factors, including:

- Characteristics of the cancer cells (such as hormone receptor status and HER2 status)
- Where the cancer has spread
- Your current symptoms
- Previous breast cancer treatments
- Your age and general health
- Availability of medications

## What are the types of treatment?

**Hormone therapy** is usually the first treatment for estrogen receptor-positive MBC, even if you have taken hormone therapy in the past. If the first hormone therapy stops working and the cancer starts to grow again, a second hormone therapy can be used. If the second drug stops working, another can be tried. Drugs known as CDK4/6 inhibitors may be used in combination with hormone therapy.

**Chemotherapy** is usually the first treatment when hormone therapy is not an option. If the first chemotherapy drug (or combination of drugs) stops working and the cancer grows, a second or third regimen may be used.

**Targeted therapies** are drugs used to treat HER2-positive MBC.

**Immunotherapy** can be given for certain types of tumours.

**Clinical trials** may be available to you in which new forms of treatment may be an option. Your oncologist will discuss these with you, and together you can decide whether to try such therapy.

## Stopping treatment for cancer

At some point, treatment to control cancer may need to be stopped. This can happen when treatment no longer shows benefit or when it greatly affects your quality of life. Once treatment is stopped, the focus shifts to palliative care, which aims to provide comfort and maintain the highest possible quality of life. It's important to discuss your thoughts and fears with your doctor and family. They can offer support and guidance during this time.

## How to get support

Learning you have MBC can be very challenging. It's normal to feel fear, shock, sadness, anger, and depression. You do not have to face this alone. Social support from family, friends, and others can improve your emotional well-being and quality of life.

Formal support, such as counseling in a one-on-one or group setting, is available at the Aga Khan University Hospital. Psychologists dedicated to the special needs of cancer patients can provide advice on how to best manage the emotional challenges during treatment. For additional information on psychological support, you may refer to the psycho-oncology patient information resource.

## The Aga Khan University Hospital

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