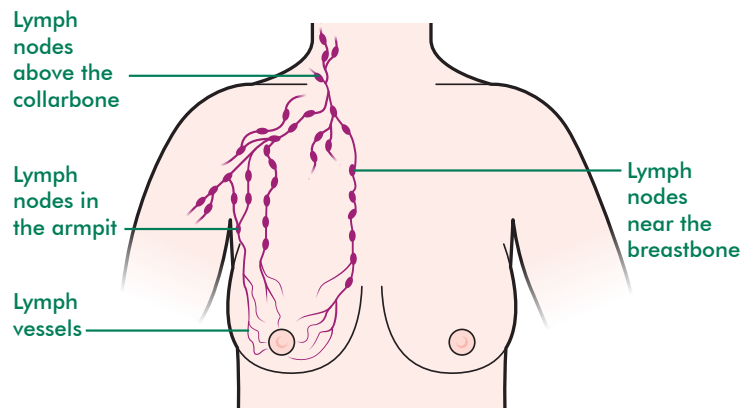


# Breast cancer - Matepukupuku ā-Ū



contains lymph nodes (glands). Breast changes may be early signs of breast cancer and should be checked by a GP.



**When you hear you have breast cancer you may have a lot of questions about the diagnosis, treatment, practical support and emotional impact. You can find information here to help you.**

*“Having cancer didn’t stop me from having a good life. I had lots of support from whānau, doctors and hospital staff as well as the Cancer Society. I really appreciated it because it was a difficult time.”*

Rangi

## Understanding breast cancer

More than 3,000 women and a small number of men are diagnosed with breast cancer every year. You are more likely to survive breast cancer if it is found early.

For most people, the causes of breast cancer are not known. Breast cancer is a disease of breast tissue cells. Breast tissue includes the lower armpit (axilla), which

## Diagnosing breast cancer

If your GP is concerned that your symptoms may be signs of breast cancer, they will recommend further tests (mammogram or ultrasound) to be done or you may be referred directly to a breast cancer specialist.

A biopsy removes a small sample of tissue from your breast to see if there are any cancer cells present. If your biopsy shows that you have breast cancer, further tests or scans may be done.

Breast cancer is divided into two main types: ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS) and invasive breast cancer.

## Staging and grading

When you are diagnosed with breast cancer, you may hear your treatment team talk about your cancer by its stage or grade. Knowing the stage and grade of your breast cancer is important as it helps your treatment team decide the best treatment for you.

Staging describes the size of your cancer and if it has spread to other parts of your body. Grading describes what your cancer cells look like.



## Making treatment decisions

The treatment choices you are offered will be based on all the information available about your cancer.

- From the time you are diagnosed with breast cancer you will be cared for by a team of different health professionals.
- Think about the questions you want to have answered and take a support person with you when you visit your treatment team.
- You can ask your cancer doctor or GP to refer you to another cancer doctor as you are entitled to a second opinion if you want one.

## Breast cancer treatment

Breast cancer can be treated in different ways: surgery, radiation treatment, chemotherapy, hormonal therapy, and targeted treatments.

Some treatments for breast cancer can make you infertile. Talk to your treatment team about fertility and contraception before treatment starts.

Discuss with your treatment team, any other treatments you are considering using.

### Surgery

If you have been diagnosed with early breast cancer, you are likely to be offered surgery to remove the cancer. Some people may be offered chemotherapy before surgery to shrink the cancer and make it easier to remove.

You will usually have one or more of the lymph nodes in your armpit removed at the time of your surgery, and some or all of your breast tissue (mastectomy).

### *After breast cancer surgery*

After a mastectomy it may be possible for you to have a breast reconstruction.

The first time you look at your breast or chest after surgery can be overwhelming. Swelling and bruising should settle in a few weeks. In time the scar will flatten and fade.

### Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy uses medication to kill cancer cells or slow their growth. It affects cells throughout your body and is used to reduce the risk of cancer returning in your breast or growing in other parts of your body.

More information on chemotherapy: [www.cancernz.org.nz/cancer-information/treatment/chemotherapy](http://www.cancernz.org.nz/cancer-information/treatment/chemotherapy)

**Some side effects of chemotherapy can be life threatening. You must contact your treatment team, or go to your nearest hospital emergency department immediately and tell them you are receiving chemotherapy treatment if you develop any of the following symptoms:**

- **fever – a temperature over 38°C**
- **chills – shivers or shakes, feeling hot or cold**
- **chest pain**
- **difficulty breathing**
- **vomiting that continues after taking anti- sickness medication**
- **diarrhoea**
- **gum or nose bleeds, or bleeding that doesn't stop**
- **pain or burning when passing urine or blood in urine.**

### Radiation treatment

Radiation treatment is the use of radiation beams to destroy cancer cells or slow their growth. Radiation treatment only affects the part of the body that the beams are aimed at. To read more about how radiation treatment: <https://auckland-northland.cancernz.org.nz/cancer-information/treatment/radiation-treatment>

### Hormone treatment (endocrine therapy)

If the results of hormone receptor testing show that you have hormone receptor positive cancer you will be offered hormone treatment (endocrine therapy). If your cancer is not hormone receptor positive, you will not be offered hormone treatment.

These are different treatments that lower or block the level of oestrogen and progesterone in the body. The choice of treatment will depend on your age, if your breast cancer has hormone receptors on it and, for women, if you have reached menopause.

Early menopause can be one side-effect of these treatments in some women. More information:

[https://canceraustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/bcmc-breast-cancer-early-menopause-v2\\_504af03adb71c.pdf](https://canceraustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/bcmc-breast-cancer-early-menopause-v2_504af03adb71c.pdf)

All breast cancer treatments have side effects. Talk to your treatment team about ways to manage these.

## Targeted treatment for HER2 positive breast cancer

If the results of HER2 testing show you have a higher than normal level of the HER2 protein, your breast cancer is identified as HER2 positive and you will be offered targeted treatment. The most commonly used targeted treatment is Trastuzumab (Herceptin). Perjeta may be offered in some situations, but is currently only funded for advanced breast cancer.



## Side effects of treatment

During treatment and after surgery, you may experience a number of side effects.

### Any signs of infection should be treated immediately.

- Cancer-related fatigue is one of the most common side effects.
- Remember that your mental health is as important as your physical health and there is support available to you.
- Some people may have problems with the effects of surgery for some time afterwards. These include:
  - cording
  - pain in your arm and changes to sensation
  - changes to your arm or shoulder movement
  - seroma (fluid collecting around the wound).

## Living well with breast cancer

For most people side effects of treatment begin to ease within a few weeks of treatment ending. Some side effects can last longer.

- Find positive ways to focus on your body.

- Talk with your employer about what support you might need at work while you are having treatment.
- Meeting and talking to others who are in a similar situation can help after you have a diagnosis of breast cancer.
- Fear of your cancer coming back is not unusual but many people who have had cancer say that, with time, they feel less anxious.

*“Doing exercises and having healthy food, keeping positive. This helped me a lot – as well as the support from the group. We share our experiences and talk about treatments.”*

*Jacinda*

## More information

**Breast cancer** <https://cancernz.org.nz/cancer-information/cancer-types/breast-cancer/>

**Secondary breast cancer** <https://www.cancer.org.nz/assets/Content/Cancer-Booklets/Booklet-secondary-breast-cancer.pdf>

**Side effects- cancer related fatigue** <https://www.cancer.org.nz/assets/Downloads/Info-sheet-cancer-related-fatigue-v2.pdf>

**Living with lymphoedema** <https://www.cancer.org.nz/assets/Downloads/Info-sheet-living-with-lymphoedema.pdf>

### Exercise after Breast cancer surgery

<https://www.breastcancerfoundation.org.nz/support/cancer-rehab/exercise-following-surgery>

**Breast Cancer Care (UK)** [www.breastcancercare.org.uk/information-support](http://www.breastcancercare.org.uk/information-support)

**Macmillan Cancer Support (UK)** [www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/](http://www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/)

**Breast Cancer Aotearoa Coalition (New Zealand)** [www.breastcancer.org.nz](http://www.breastcancer.org.nz)

**BreastScreen Aotearoa** <https://www.timetoscreen.nz/breast-screening>

**Breast Cancer Foundation** <https://www.breastcancerfoundation.org.nz>