

# Breast Cancer Glossary



**Adenocarcinoma** – Cancer that begins in cells that line certain internal organs and that have gland-like (secretory) properties.

**Adjuvant therapy** – Treatment given after the primary treatment to increase the chances of a cure. Adjuvant therapy may include chemotherapy, radiation therapy, hormone therapy, or biological therapy.

**Angiogenesis** – Blood vessel formation. Tumor angiogenesis is the growth of new blood vessels needed for tumors to grow. This is caused by the release of chemicals by the tumor.

**Aromatase Inhibitors** – A drug that prevents the formation of estradiol, a female hormone, by interfering with an aromatase enzyme. Aromatase inhibitors are used as a type of hormone therapy for postmenopausal women who have hormone-dependent breast cancer.

**Biopsy** – The removal of cells or tissues for examination by a pathologist. The pathologist may study the tissue under a microscope or perform other tests on the cells or tissue.

**Carcinoma** – Cancer that begins in the skin or in tissues that line or cover internal organs.

**Carcinoma In Situ** – A group of abnormal cells that remain in the tissue in which they first formed. These abnormal cells may become cancer and spread into nearby normal tissue.

**Chemotherapy** – Treatment with drugs that kill cancer cells.

**Computed Tomography (CT)** – A series of detailed pictures of areas inside the body taken from different angles. The pictures are created by a computer linked to an x-ray machine. Also called CAT scan, computerized axial tomography scan, computerized tomography, and CT scan.

**Disease-Free Survival Rate** – The length of time after treatment for a specific disease during which a patient survives with no sign of the disease.

**Five-Year Survival Rate** – The percentage of people in a study or treatment group who are alive five years after they were diagnosed with or treated for a disease, such as cancer. The disease may or may not have come back.

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**Fluorescence In Situ Hybridization (FISH)** – A laboratory technique used to look at genes or chromosomes in cells and tissues. Pieces of DNA that contain a fluorescent dye are made in the laboratory and added to cells or tissues on a glass slide. When these pieces of DNA bind to specific genes or areas of chromosomes on the slide, they light up when viewed under a microscope with a special light.

**Immunohistochemistry (IHC)** - A laboratory technique used to look at proteins in the cells of tissues by visualizing an antigen-antibody interaction.

**Hormone Therapy** – Treatment that adds, blocks, or removes hormones.

**Local Therapy** – Treatment that affects cells in the tumor and the area close to it.

**Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)** – A procedure in which radio waves and a powerful magnet linked to a computer are used to create detailed pictures of areas inside the body. These pictures can show the difference between normal and diseased tissue. Magnetic resonance imaging makes better images of organs and soft tissue than other scanning techniques, such as computed tomography (CT) or x-ray.

**Mammography** – The use of x-rays to create a picture of the breast.

**Metastasis** – The spread of cancer from one part of the body to another. A tumor formed by cells that have spread is called a “metastatic tumor” or a “metastasis.”

**Neoadjuvant Therapy** – Treatment given as a first step to shrink a tumor before the main treatment, which is usually surgery, is given. Examples of neoadjuvant therapy include chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and hormone therapy.

**Oncogene** – A gene that normally directs cell growth. If altered, an oncogene can promote or allow the uncontrolled growth of cancer. Alterations can be inherited or caused by an environmental exposure to carcinogens.

**Palliative Treatment** – Care given to improve the quality of life of patients who have a serious or life-threatening disease. The goal of palliative care is to prevent or treat as early as possible the symptoms of a disease, side effects caused by treatment of a disease, and psychological, social, and spiritual problems related to a disease or its treatment.

**Positron Emission Tomography (PET)** – A procedure in which a small amount of radioactive glucose (sugar) is injected into a vein, and a scanner is used to make detailed, computerized pictures of areas inside the body where the glucose is used. Because cancer cells often use more glucose than normal cells, the pictures can be used to find cancer cells in the body.

**Progression Free Survival** - The length of time during and after treatment in which a patient is living with a disease that does not get worse.

**Radiation Therapy** – The use of high-energy radiation from x-rays, gamma rays, neutrons, protons, and other sources to kill cancer cells and shrink tumors.

**Stage** – The extent of a cancer in the body. Staging is usually based on the size of the tumor, whether lymph nodes contain cancer, and whether the cancer has spread from the original site to other parts of the body.

**Time to Progression** - A measurement of time after a disease is diagnosed (or treated) until the disease starts to get worse.

**Ultrasound** – A procedure in which high-energy sound waves (ultrasound) are bounced off internal tissues or organs and make echoes. The echo patterns are shown on the screen of an ultrasound machine, forming a picture of body tissues called a sonogram.

**Reference:** NCI Dictionary of Cancer Terms, [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

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