

Inflammatory Breast Cancer

Inflammatory breast cancer (IBC) is an uncommon, highly aggressive form of breast cancer in which the lymph vessels in the breast become blocked by cancerous cells. This disease acquired its name due to its primary symptoms of redness and swelling. IBC spreads throughout the breast, but it is not commonly detected by mammograms or ultrasounds because the disease often does not produce a well-defined lump.

Among all breast cancer cases in the United States, IBC comprises approximately 1 to 3 percent of cases. Early detection and treatment are important, as IBC can spread quickly to other areas of the body.

Symptoms

The following may be symptoms of IBC, but could be linked to other health conditions. If these symptoms are present, patients are encouraged to consult their doctor for proper testing:

- Sudden increase in the size of one breast
- Warmth, redness, and swelling of the breast
- Recurring itching or pain in the breast
- Dimpling of the skin resembling the peel of an orange (peau d'orange)
- Ridging or thickening of the skin on the breast
- Nipple discharge, retraction, or flattening
- Change in the color of the areola (dark skin surrounding the nipple)
- A bruise on the breast that will not heal
- Swelling of lymph nodes on the neck, underarm, or collarbone

Risk Factors

- African-American women have a slightly higher risk of IBC.
- IBC tends to have a higher incidence in younger women.
- Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding may be diagnosed with IBC.
- Men can also be diagnosed with IBC.

Treatment Options

Anyone with IBC should consult with a medical oncologist to determine his or her specific treatment needs. There are two main types of treatment: systemic and local. Chemotherapy, hormone therapy, and targeted therapy are systemic therapies. Surgery and radiation therapy are local treatments. Systemic and local treatments are often used together to provide the best treatment.

Advances in the treatment of breast cancer and new research have improved the survival rate of IBC patients. Patients have as much as a 50 percent chance of survival after five years. IBC symptoms may be mistaken for other conditions. If patients have concerns about their symptoms and treatment, they should seek a second opinion.

Sources: American Cancer Society, National Cancer Institute, Inflammatory Breast Cancer Research Foundation, and The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation (Facts for Life: Inflammatory Breast Cancer)

