

## SECONDARY BREAST CANCER

When breast cancer spreads to other parts of the body

### *POORTI-15: Secondary breast cancer*

Cancer that has spread beyond breast tissues, to other parts of the body is known as secondary breast cancer or metastasis. This can happen if a cancer cell has spread through the lymph nodes through the bloodstream to other organs of the body.

In case the breast cancer has advanced to metastasis, it is detected during the screening tests of primary breast cancer itself. It is important to identify the symptoms and consult a doctor immediately if you face any of the symptoms.

#### **Stage 1**

Early disease: tumour confined to the breast (node-negative)



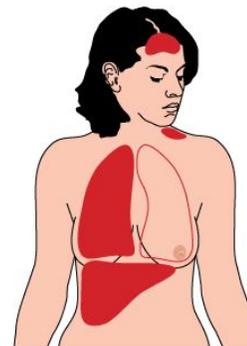
#### **Stage 2**

Early disease: tumour spread to movable ipsilateral axillary node(s) (node-positive)



#### **Stage 3**

Locally advanced disease: tumour spread to the superficial structures of the chest wall; involvement of ipsilateral internal mammary lymph nodes



#### **Stage 4**

Advanced (or metastatic) disease; metastases present at distant sites, such as bone, liver, lungs and brain and including supraclavicular lymph node involvement



## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF SECONDARY BREAST CANCER

The symptoms of secondary breast cancer are often similar to as experienced in other types of cancer. Few common symptoms include:

- Persistent feeling of fatigue
- Nausea and dizziness
- Unexplained weight loss or loss of appetite

Other varying symptoms include

- Pain in the bones of fractures (indications of Bone cancer)
- Constant cough or breathlessness (indications of Lung cancer)
- Jaundice or fluid build up in the abdomen (indications of Liver Cancer)
- Headache, nausea, seizures, problems with speech or vision (indications of Brain Cancer)
- A change in skin color or painless lumps (indications of Skin Cancer)

Often it is seen that these symptoms appear as after effects of your primary breast cancer treatment. Most people lose their appetite and suffer from nausea for weeks after cancer therapy. Yet, it is important to be aware of them and report to your oncologist at the first instance. Early detection of secondary breast cancer can increase chances of quick treatment manifold and inhibits it's spread further.





## TESTS TO DETECT SECONDARY BREAST CANCER

The tests to detect secondary breast cancer are usually the same as used to detect the cancer cells in different organs of the body. For instance, if it is suspected that the breast cancer has spread to your lungs, tests to detect lung cancer shall be done.

The following generalised kinds of tests are done for detection.

- **Computerised Tomography (CT) scan:** In which x-rays are used to take detailed pictures of the body
- **Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scan:** Uses magnetism and radio waves for imaging the tissues and cells in the body.
- **Blood Tests:** Different blood tests are conducted to detect the presence of different substances in blood, that might be indicative of cancer cells.



## TREATMENT FOR SECONDARY BREAST CANCER

Commonly used treatments for cancer include:

- **Hormone Therapy:** If the cancer is hormone receptor positive.
- **Chemotherapy:** Use of anti cancer drugs to interfere with the growth of cancer cells
- **Bone Strengthening Therapy:** If the cancer has spread to the bones.



Depending upon the features or extensiveness of breast cancer, the treatment and its intensity is decided by the oncologists. Your general health in future is also considered an important factor.

The aims of secondary breast cancer treatment is to control the spread of cancer cells and give you the best quality of life, including physical and mental well-being as long as possible.



## TO FIGHT SECONDARY CANCER AND COME BACK

It is true that secondary breast cancer has lower survival rates than primary. Credible sources report that primary breast cancer survival rate is as good as 90% with proper and timely treatment, whereas with secondary breast cancer, there is a sudden drop to 72%.

Metastasis is what is commonly known as Stage 4 of cancer. This means that the cancer cells have spread across other organs of the body, and there is need of extensive treatment. Often this has no cure, but with proper treatment, the quality and longevity of life can be increased.

What comes here as a major deciding factor is how you encounter your breast cancer. You would feel very ill, fatigued and lose vigour. There would be physical changes happening to your body too. But you need to stay strong and not give up. With proper medication and maintaining a healthy lifestyle, you can live normally for a long time. In the meantime, you may choose to spread breast cancer awareness, and your journey during treatment. A peer story is often seen to uplift mental well being of other breast cancer patients.



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If you have decided to quit your regular job, you can resort to hobbies like sketching and cooking or reading books. You can also join any breast support group, and help other women suffering from breast cancer. With due course of time, you shall resume your normal life.

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