



Understanding ER+, HER2-Metastatic Breast Cancer

A guide to help you with your healthcare decisions

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Images are illustrative only and do not show real patients.

Welcome to your metastatic breast cancer (MBC) question guide

Metastatic breast cancer (MBC) is breast cancer that has spread to other parts of the body. A common type is **ER-positive (ER+), HER2-negative (HER2-)**, meaning the cancer has oestrogen receptors and normal HER2 levels. These features help predict outcomes and guide treatment, as explained over the next pages.

If you are living with ER+, HER2- MBC, you may be dealing with a range of emotions, care decisions and life changes. This guide is here to support you – by helping you ask the right questions and get the information you need from your healthcare team, so you can make decisions that are right for you.

Developed with breast cancer patient representatives from around the world, this resource reflects the needs and perspectives of the MBC community.

How to use the guide

Inside you'll find the **ER+, HER2- MBC Patient Pathway**. This outlines the typical stages of care from diagnosis, although everyone's experience may be different. The rest of the guide follows that pathway, providing a set of helpful questions you can ask your healthcare team at each stage, alongside helpful resources and tips.*

To help you navigate this guide, questions have been grouped into four key themes:

General

Testing

Treatment

Wellbeing

Not every question will apply to your situation, and not every question is for your oncologist. Depending on the topic, it may be best to speak to your nurse, family doctor or another member of your healthcare team.

You can use this guide in whatever way works best for you, before appointments to help you prepare or afterwards to reflect on what was discussed.

* The questions and resources in this guide may vary depending on your country's healthcare system, available treatments and local support services.
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Key terms and what they mean

As you follow your own MBC pathway, you'll likely come across medical terms that may be new or unclear. This section explains some of the key words and phrases you might hear in conversations with your healthcare team or read in your notes or test results.

If you're ever unsure about a term or what something means for you, don't hesitate to ask your healthcare team. They're there to help.

Anti-hormonal therapy:

A treatment that adds, blocks the function of or removes hormones. In breast cancer, it involves drugs that block the effects of, stop the production of or lower the amount of oestrogen in the body. Also known as endocrine therapy.

Biomarkers:

Biological molecules (naturally occurring) found in tissues, blood or other body fluids that are a sign of a condition or disease or describe its behaviour.

Biomarker testing:

A test to check for biomarkers. In cancer, this can help determine what's causing it to grow and the most effective treatment.

Biopsy:

A procedure to remove cells, tissue or fluid from the body for examination in a laboratory to check for cancer or biomarkers. This can include a tissue biopsy or a liquid biopsy (blood).

Chemotherapy:

Medicine that kills cancer cells or stops them from growing, usually given through an infusion into a vein but may be given as a tablet.

ER (oestrogen receptor):

A protein inside a cell that binds the hormone oestrogen.

ER-positive (ER+):

Cancer cells have oestrogen receptors and may grow in response to the hormone oestrogen. These tumours are slow growing and tend to be less aggressive than other breast cancer subtypes.

ESR1 mutation:

An acquired (somatic) change in the *ESR1* gene that can develop after anti-hormonal therapy. It causes the ER to become overactive or present in higher-than-normal amounts in certain cancer cells, contributing to the cancer growing or spreading.

Human epidermal growth factor receptor 2 (HER2):

A protein that can promote the growth of cancer cells. In some cancers, high levels of HER2 are present and drive the progression of the disease.

HER2-negative (HER2-):

Cancer cells with normal levels of HER2. These tumours are generally less likely to grow and spread quickly than HER2-positive ones.

Incurable:

A word used when cancer can't be completely removed, but treatment can help control it.

Liquid biopsy:

A test performed on a blood sample to look for cancer cells or pieces of DNA shed from cancer cells.

Metastatic breast cancer (MBC):

Breast cancer that has spread to other parts of the body beyond the breast and nearby tissues. Also known as advanced breast cancer.

Mutation:

A change in a gene. Some mutations can affect how cancer grows or responds to treatment. This includes mutations in the *AKT1*, *PTEN*, *BRCA1/2* and *PALB2* genes.

PIK3CA mutation:

A change in the *PIK3CA* gene that can affect how breast cancer grows, and which treatments may work.

Radiotherapy:

Treatment that uses radiation, usually X-rays, to kill cancer cells.

Supportive care:

Care that helps manage symptoms and side effects, and improves comfort, but doesn't cure the cancer. It can be offered at any stage of illness and is often provided alongside active treatment.

Targeted therapy:

Medicine that attacks specific parts of cancer cells without harming most healthy cells, given as a tablet or through an injection or infusion.

Telemedicine:

Talking to your doctor by phone or video call instead of going to the clinic.

Tissue biopsy:

A procedure in which a small sample of tissue is removed from the body for examination in a laboratory.

Treatment guidelines:

Recommendations developed by experts on a local, regional or global level, to help doctors and patients make decisions about the best approaches to the treatment of diseases.

Biomarkers and treatments in MBC

MBC is complex, but advances in testing and treatment are helping people live longer with better quality of life.¹ Understanding your options can help you to feel more informed and in control.

Biomarkers

Biomarkers are features of your cancer that can give more information about how your cancer might behave and help guide treatment decisions. Testing for them can determine if you might benefit from certain therapies or clinical trials. Here are some of the biomarkers that may be tested in your MBC, along with the types of treatments they can help guide or predict response to:²⁻⁷

Biomarker	Why it matters: May give more information for the use of...	How it's tested
ESR1 mutation	Oral selective oestrogen receptor degraders (SERDs)	Via blood (preferred) or tissue
AKT1/PTEN mutation	AKT inhibitors	Via blood (preferred) or tissue
PIK3CA mutation	PI3K inhibitors	Via tissue (preferred) or blood
BRCA1/2 mutation	PARP inhibitors*	Via tissue
PALB2 mutation	PARP inhibitors*	Via blood or saliva
HER2 expression	HER2-targeted therapy	Via tissue (preferred) or blood

* PARP inhibitors are only approved for inherited (germline) *BRCA1/2* or *PALB2* mutations. Ask your doctor if your mutation is inherited or acquired (somatic), as this affects treatment options.

Find questions to ask your healthcare team about **Biomarker testing** on pages **22–23**.

Types of treatment

Your treatment plan will depend on the features of your MBC, whether it has certain biomarkers, how it behaves and how your body responds. Here are some of the main types of treatments used:^{2-4,7-9}

Treatment type	How it works
Anti-hormonal therapy + CDK4/6 inhibitors	Work together to block oestrogen and slow down cancer cell growth.
PI3K/AKT/mTOR inhibitors	Block the pathways that cancer cells rely on to grow and survive.
Selective oestrogen receptor degraders	Break down the oestrogen receptor to block the cancer’s fuel source.
PARP inhibitors	Stop cancer cells with certain mutations from repairing themselves.
Chemotherapy	Kills fast-growing cells, including cancer, throughout the body.
Antibody-drug conjugates	Deliver chemotherapy directly to cancer cells in a more targeted way.

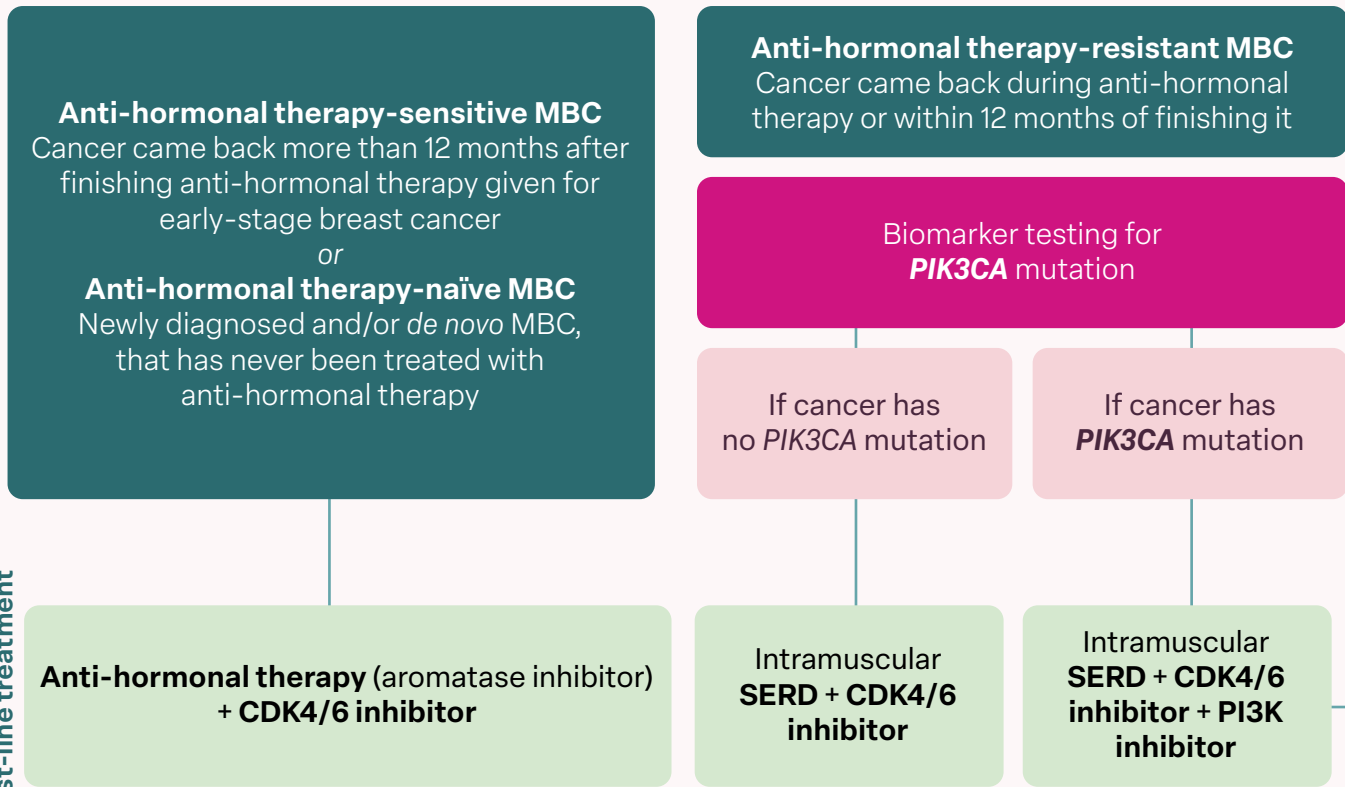
Find questions to ask your healthcare team about **Treatment decision-making** on pages **14–15**.

The ER+, HER2- MBC Treatment Pathway

Your treatment pathway will depend on different factors like when your cancer was diagnosed or came back, how it responds to anti-hormonal therapy, the presence of certain biomarkers and your health.

This flowchart shows typical treatment options for ER+, HER2- MBC, and is modelled on the **European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO) Metastatic Breast Cancer Living Guideline**, April 2025.²⁻⁴ The ESMO Living Guideline is a treatment guideline that is regularly updated to reflect the latest evidence.

Remember: Every person's cancer is different. Your treatment plan may vary depending on your individual needs and what you and your healthcare team decide together.

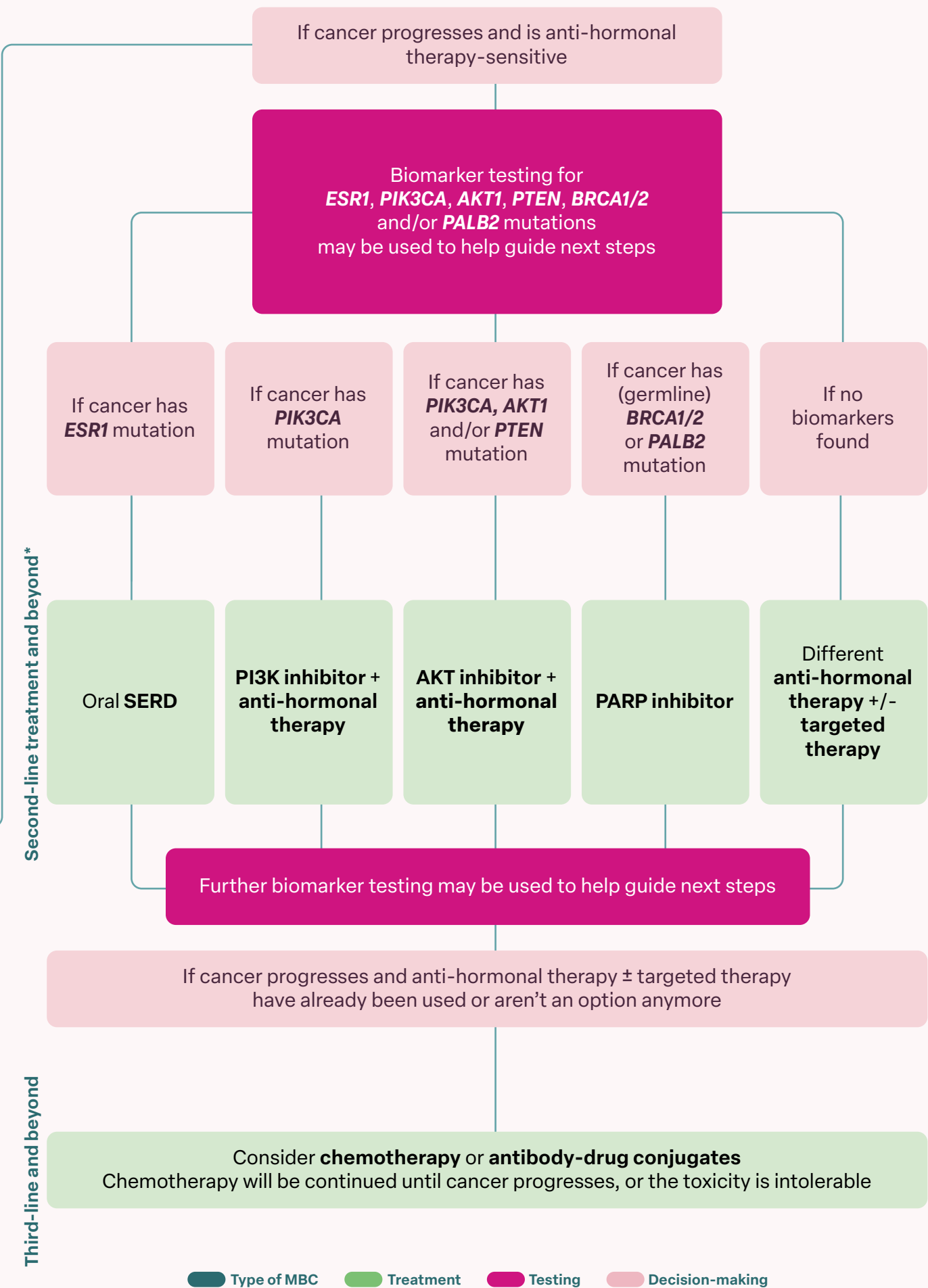


ESMO Metastatic Breast Cancer Living Guideline, v1.2 April 2025; original Clinical Practice Guideline Ann Oncol 2021;32(12): 1475-1495. Available from <https://www.esmo.org/guidelines/living-guidelines/esmo-living-guideline-metastatic-breast-cancer>. Accessed October 2025. Distributed by Menarini with permission from ESMO.²

* Some of these treatments may be used in combination, depending on the cancer's genetic profile and how it has responded to previous treatments. Not all treatments are suitable for everyone, and some may only be used after others have been tried.

Treatment pathway considerations

- Local treatments (those that target only the cancer's area) like radiotherapy or surgery may be considered on a case-by-case basis to help with symptoms or small areas of spread (metastases).
- In case of visceral crisis, which stops organs functioning correctly, urgent treatment may be needed that does not follow this pathway.
- For those who are pre-menopausal, treatment may include temporarily stopping the ovaries from producing oestrogen to help anti-hormonal therapy work better.
- If the cancer no longer responds to hormone treatment and targeted therapies aren't an option, chemotherapy or special medicines that deliver chemotherapy directly to the cancer cells (antibody-drug conjugates) may be used.





The ER+, HER2- MBC Patient Pathway

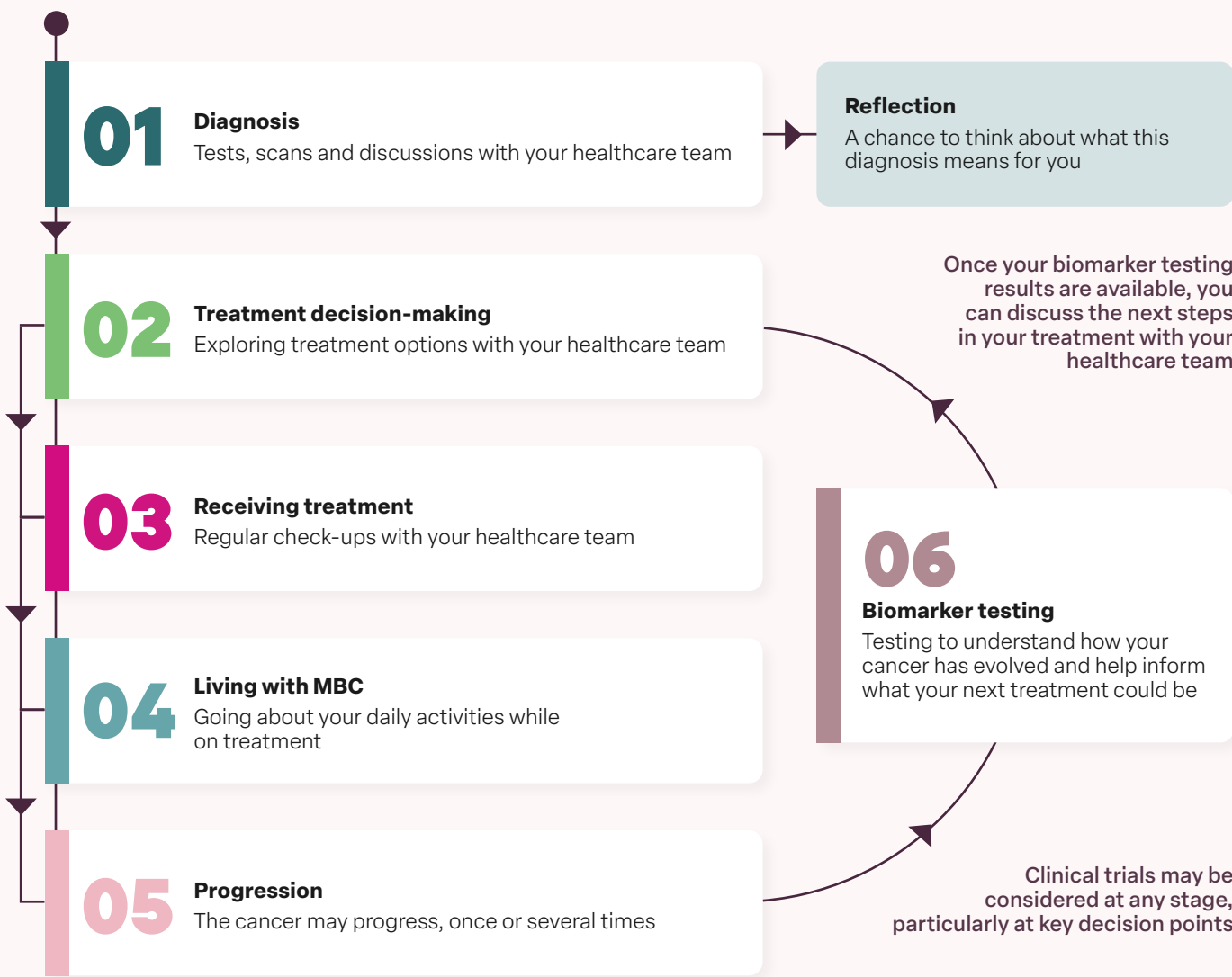
Every person with ER+, HER2- MBC is unique and will have their own experiences and challenges. However, there are some common stages which will apply to you.

The **ER+, HER2- MBC Patient Pathway** has been adapted from the ESMO Living Guidelines.²⁻⁴

This pathway provides a general idea of what you can expect to happen after you have been diagnosed with ER+, HER2- MBC.

At each stage, you may want to understand more about what this means for you. This guide provides questions and resources that can help you to have useful discussions with your healthcare team.

Go to each stage to find related questions and resources.



Ready to think about the future?

This guide doesn't cover later stages of the MBC pathway. If you're looking for information about later stages of care and planning ahead, you can find trusted resources at the end of the guide that may help.

Consider a clinical trial

An opportunity to explore clinical trial options and potentially receive a new investigational treatment

Diagnosis



Hearing you have MBC can be frightening and life-changing. It can feel like a lot to process.

In the early days of your diagnosis, you'll likely have to deal with new medical terms, tests and decisions. One test may lead to another, each result raising new questions. You may be asked to make complex choices quickly, while still processing the emotional weight of what's happening.

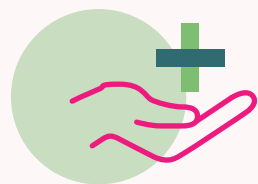
Asking questions can help bring clarity and a sense of control during a time that may feel uncertain. Discussions with your healthcare team can help you make sense of what's happening and think about what comes next.

Now is the time to begin learning about MBC and what your own diagnosis means, both medically and personally.



Understanding your diagnosis

- What is MBC? How does it develop?
- How and where does MBC spread?
- What does incurable mean?
- What type of MBC do I have?
- What is ER+/- or progesterone receptor (PR)+/-? What does it mean for me?
- What is HER2+/-? What does it mean for me?
- How can I learn more about my specific diagnosis?
- Should I have biomarker testing?



Exploring initial treatment options

- Are there specific treatments for me?
- Can I have chemotherapy? If not, why not?
- Can I have surgery? If not, why not?
- Can I have radiotherapy? If not, why not?
- Can I have targeted therapy? If not, why not?



Adjusting to life after diagnosis

- What will my everyday life be like?
- Can I continue working or caring for my family?
- Can I live alone?
- Where can I find professional emotional, psychological and practical support?
- Where can I find financial support?
- How can I talk to my loved ones about my diagnosis?

Reflection

Being diagnosed with MBC can feel overwhelming. Amid all the medical information and decisions, it's also an important moment to pause and reflect on what this means for you. Take some time to explore your thoughts and reconnect with what matters most. There's no right or wrong way to feel, and your feelings may change over time.

Here are a few questions you can ask yourself:

- What matters most to me right now?
- How do I want to approach the time ahead?
- Who or what helps me feel supported?



Top tip

Take time to learn about your cancer. The more you know, the better prepared you'll be. Become your own expert.

Resources



Europa Donna Coalition
MBC Advocates Speak Out
- Vivien Cassar
[Scan the QR code to view](#)



Cancer Support Community
Diagnosis: Metastatic Breast Cancer
(MBC) - Jeanna
[Scan the QR code to view](#)

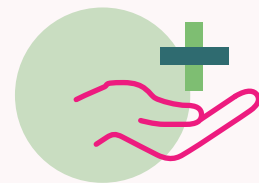
Treatment decision-making

You may have to make decisions about your care and treatment at diagnosis or after progressions. At any point, it's natural to feel uncertain or have questions.

There's no single "right" path when it comes to treating MBC. Asking the right questions to your healthcare team can help you understand your

options and make informed decisions. Together, you can make a treatment plan that reflects your needs and preferences. And it's okay if those change over time.

You might revisit decisions as your situation evolves or as you learn more. What matters is that your choices continue to feel right for you.



Making informed treatment decisions that reflect your needs and preferences

Questions to ask about any new treatment:

- Can we talk about what's most important to me in my treatment plan?
- Will my preferences actually influence my treatment plan?
- How much time do I have to make a treatment decision?
- Can and should I get a second opinion?
- What are my treatment options now?
- How effective are treatments?
- Will this new treatment work for me?
- How long will treatments last for?
- How will I know if my treatment is working?
- What happens if I choose not to undergo treatment?
- Can I change my mind about treatment later?
- Can I have supportive care alongside my treatment?

Extra questions to consider if your cancer has progressed:

- What are my options now that my cancer has changed?
- Could the side effects from earlier treatments build up over time?

Resources



METUPUK
The Story of Jo Taylor On How Her
MBC Changed Over Time
[Scan the QR code to view](#)

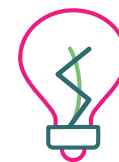


ABC Global Alliance
Honestly Spoken: Maximizing
Communication With Your Doctor
[Scan the QR code to view](#)



Preparing for the impact of treatment

- How might this treatment impact my life?
- Will I have side effects with this treatment and what could they be?
- How might side effects of treatment impact my life?
- What medications or supplements should I avoid with this treatment?
- What foods or drinks should I avoid with this treatment?
- Will I have pain? If yes, how can I deal with it?
- Is it safe for me to continue taking my other medications alongside my treatment?
- Can I delay starting treatment for a holiday or special event?



Top tip

Take your time with decisions. Don't hesitate to ask questions - there are no silly ones when it comes to your health - or seek a second opinion.



Top tip

Bring someone you trust to your appointments. They can help you feel supported and catch important details you might miss.

Consider a clinical trial

Clinical trials may offer access to new treatments that aren't widely available yet. They may be worth considering as a possible option, either now or in the future.

Here are a few helpful questions to help you start a conversation about clinical trials with your healthcare team:

- Are there any clinical trials that could be right for me?
- What are the possible benefits and risks?
- How could a clinical trial affect my current treatment?

Your team can help you understand what's involved and whether a clinical trial might be right for you.



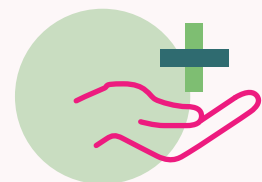
Receiving treatment

Regular check-ups are an essential part of your care. You'll have regular appointments with your healthcare team to track how your treatment is working, manage any side effects and make sure your care continues to meet your needs.

The questions below cover what to expect from your treatment and how to look after your wellbeing throughout.

Everyone's experience is different and may change over time, depending on how your cancer responds and how you feel physically and emotionally.

Side effects can vary and may build up gradually. Being open about what you're experiencing helps your healthcare team to support you and adjust your care as needed.



Getting treatment and what to expect

- How will I know if my treatment is working? What signs should I look out for that it might not be?
- How will I know if I'm experiencing a side effect?
- Is it useful for me to track symptoms or side effects between care visits?
- What symptoms or side effects are serious, and when should I call my healthcare team?
- How can I manage side effects?
- Can I pause treatment if side effects become too difficult?
- What happens if I want to take a break from treatment?
- Can I receive my current treatment at home? If not, where and how often will I need to go somewhere to receive treatment?
- What care is arranged for me as part of my current treatment plan, and what do I need to know and organise?
- Can I have online consultations (telemedicine)? How do they work?
- What should I do if I miss a dose or take too much of my treatment?



Getting regular check-ups during treatment

- How often will I need to see my healthcare team? Is that enough?
- What types of check-ups do I need?
- Will I need blood tests? If so, how often? And what are they checking for?
- Will I need scans? If so, how often? And what are they checking for?
- How long will I have to wait for the results of my scans or tests?



Managing your wellbeing during treatment

- Can I pause treatment for holidays or special events?
- Are there complementary treatments you recommend or suggest I avoid? How can I find reliable options?
- How can I deal with anxiety while waiting for results? Are there support resources or phone applications I can use?
- How can I manage my fatigue during treatment?
- What kind of diet is recommended during treatment?
- My treatment is affecting my diet, who can I talk to?
- Should I try to keep my weight under control? Why might that be important for my treatment or outcomes?
- What are the benefits of physical activity during treatment? What kinds of exercise can I do?
- My treatment is making it hard to stay active, who can I talk to?



Top tip

Keep a diary to track how you're feeling and share it with your healthcare team. Most side effects can be managed.



Top tip

If you're receiving treatment at the hospital, bring a bag with comfort items, like a blanket, book or hobby, to help you relax.

Resources



ABC Global Alliance
Honestly Spoken: Supportive and Palliative Care
[Scan the QR code to view](#)



Susan G. Komen®
MBC Impact Series: Quality of Life Through Treatment - Coping with Fatigue and Nausea
[Scan the QR code to view](#)

Living with MBC

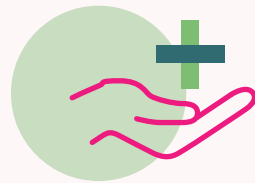


As treatment and check-ups become part of your routine, you may have questions and concerns about the impact of MBC on your daily life.

Now is a good time to speak with your healthcare team about what to expect, how to plan for changes and where to get support. They are there to address any medical concerns.

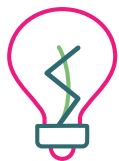
Some members, including nurses or patient navigators, can also support you with more practical matters, like finances, or connect you with someone who can.

The questions in this section are here to help you start the conversation with your healthcare team, so you can feel more confident living your life with MBC.



Making ongoing care work for your life

- How can I get a copy of my medical records?
- Are there ways to change my treatment schedule to fit around my life?
- How can I find services to help cover costs related to my treatment, e.g. medication, travel or accommodation?
- How can I find services to help with my daily living expenses during treatment?



Top tip

Living with MBC can feel like a rollercoaster, with ups and downs. Finding small moments of joy, like doing something you love or spending time with people who lift you up, can give you strength and keep you energised.



Living better with MBC

- What supportive care services are available? Will I be assigned a team?
- Why am I being offered supportive care so soon?
- Can I continue to work? What are my rights at work?
- What can I do to take care of myself while living with MBC?
- Is it safe for me to exercise? What exercise should I be doing and for how long?
- What can I try if I'm experiencing sleep problems?
- What can I try to help me relax?
- What can I try to help me manage stress, anxiety and sadness?
- When should I seek professional help if I'm feeling low or anxious?
- What should I do if I'm having problems with my sex life?
- Who can I talk to about financial or work-related issues?
- Who can I talk to about health insurance or mortgage issues?
- Where can I find support groups?

Resources



ABC Global Alliance
Honestly Spoken: Demystifying Terminology
[Scan the QR code to view](#)



Working with Cancer
Managing the Challenges of Cancer and Work
[Scan the QR code to view](#)



ABC Global Alliance
Honestly Spoken: Parenting and MBC
[Scan the QR code to view](#)



Beyond Pink
Living with Metastatic Breast Cancer
[Scan the QR code to view](#)

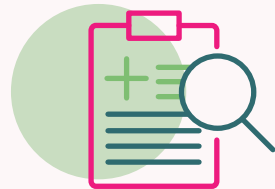
Progression

With MBC, it's common for the cancer to change or progress over time. This isn't caused by anything you did or didn't do – it's how cancer behaves. When your cancer stops responding to treatment, it may be time to explore other options.

Hearing that your cancer has progressed can be scary. You may have new questions about

what this means for your treatment and care, how you might feel and what support you'll need going forward.

This is a time to check in with your healthcare team about next steps and what matters most to you. The questions in this section can help guide those conversations, so you can feel more prepared for what's ahead.



Understanding what progression means

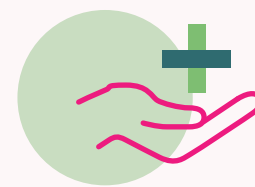
- Why has my MBC progressed?
- Why doesn't everybody have progressions? Am I doing something wrong?
- What is causing my MBC to stop responding to treatment?



What new tests can reveal

- How do you know if my cancer has changed?
- Will I need a biopsy to check if my MBC has spread to other areas?
- Do I need a new biopsy or another type of biopsy?
- Can I get a liquid biopsy with a simple blood test?

Some of the questions in this section may lead to discussions about biomarker testing. Please see the questions on **Biomarker testing** on pages 22–23, which can help you understand what it is and whether it might be relevant for you.



Exploring next steps in treatment and care

- What does a progression mean for my current treatment?
- What does a progression mean for my future care?
- If my cancer has changed, how does this affect my treatment and care?
- Are there any new treatments I should know about?
- What's the plan if my next treatment stops working?



Coping with changes

- What does a progression mean for my life?
- Can I get psychological support?
- Will I be able to work?



Top tip

Progression can happen. Try to find moments of happiness – even little moments of joy can make a big difference.



Top tip

If your cancer has progressed, consider asking your doctor about clinical trials as a possible treatment option.

Resources



Susan G. Komen®
MBC Impact Series: Dealing with
MBC Day to Day
[Scan the QR code to view](#)



CBS New York
Metastatic Breast Cancer Thriver
Sally Joy Wolf
[Scan the QR code to view](#)

Biomarker testing

If your MBC changes or progresses, your healthcare team may recommend biomarker testing. This testing will look for specific features of your cancer that could help guide your next treatment.

Biomarker testing can be done in different ways – through a tissue biopsy (where a small sample of your cancer is taken) or a liquid biopsy (using a blood sample).

Not everyone will need or be able to have this testing, but when it's possible, it can provide valuable information about which treatments may be most effective for you.

The questions in this section can help you discuss with your healthcare team about whether biomarker testing is right for you, what type of testing is involved and what the results could mean for your care.

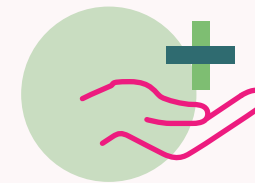
Not sure what these terms mean?

You can always refer back to **Key terms and what they mean** on pages 4–5.



What to know about biomarker testing now

- Why is biomarker testing important for me now?
- What can biomarker testing find out now?
- How often will I need biomarker testing?
- Will I have to pay for biomarker testing if I've had it before?
- Will I receive a tissue biopsy or liquid biopsy? How are they different?
- Which biomarkers should be tested now?
- When and how will I receive the test results?
- What is the meaning of the test results?
- What is the difference between *ESR1*, *PIK3CA* or other mutations?
- Which new mutations have appeared since my diagnosis?
- What do the results mean for my family?



How biomarkers affect your treatment plan

- How do specific alterations like *ESR1* or *PIK3CA* mutations affect my treatment options?
- What does it mean if I have several different mutations (co-mutations)?
- What are my treatment options now?
- If I have a mutation, will I only receive targeted therapies or might I also need chemotherapy?



Top tip

Biomarker testing is an opportunity, not something to fear. It can help guide targeted therapies, and if one biomarker isn't found, others may be discovered later.



Top tip

Tumours change over time, so make sure to ask about testing at progression and with any new occurrence of your cancer spreading.

Resources



Living Beyond Breast Cancer
Know your Biomarkers,
Know your Options
[Scan the QR code to view](#)



Young Survival Coalition
Biomarker Testing & Metastatic
Breast Cancer
[Scan the QR code to view](#)

Moving forward together

Looking ahead

Everyone's experience with ER+, HER2- MBC is different and so is the path forward.

If you're thinking about what comes next, including planning for later stages of care, you'll find links to trusted resources below. These will help you explore your options and have open conversations with your loved ones and healthcare team, so that you can make choices that reflect your wishes.



BreastCancer.org
Planning Ahead for End of Life
Scan the QR code to view



Susan G. Komen®
Metastatic Breast Cancer:
End of Life Care
Scan the QR code to view

Closing thoughts

We know that living with MBC can be scary and overwhelming. The uncertainty, decisions and day-to-day challenges. It's a lot to carry, but you don't have to carry it alone.

There's no single path, and no "right" way to feel or move forward.

We hope this guide has supported you in taking one step at a time – helping you feel more informed, prepared and confident when having open conversations and making decisions that are right for you.

No matter where you are in your own pathway, you are not alone. Around the world, many people are living with MBC facing challenges, finding strength and making choices that reflect what matters most to them.

Stay informed. Stay open. And above all, stay true to what matters most to you.

We're with you, every step of the way.

Resources



Europa Donna
The Cancer Currency
Scan the QR code to view



BreastCancer.org
16 People Living With Metastatic
Breast Cancer Share Advice for the
Newly Diagnosed
Scan the QR code to view

This guide is for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for medical advice. Always consult your healthcare team for guidance specific to your situation.

References

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Notes

You can use this space to write down any thoughts, questions or things you'd like to come back to later.

Notes

Notes

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Metastasierter
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