

Young Women and Metastatic Breast Cancer

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Breast cancer is the most common cancer and the second leading cause of cancer death among women in the United States. About 9% of all new cases of breast cancer in the United States are found in women younger than 45 years of age. The young women diagnosed with these cancers are called *young breast cancer survivors* (YBCS). They often face difficult medical, psychosocial, financial, and health issues related to their diagnosis and treatment for breast cancer. – *Centers for Disease Control*

In the United States, one in 196 women is diagnosed with breast cancer under the age of 40 years. Adolescents and young adults (AYAs), of age 15-39 years at diagnosis, experience several unique challenges when confronting breast cancer. The disease in AYA women is often more aggressive (metastatic breast cancer) and deadlier than it is in older women. AYAs should consider genetic testing at diagnosis. Suppression of ovarian function, in addition to chemotherapy, may improve breast cancer survival in AYAs. Multi-layered Optimal care for AYAs with breast cancer could include fertility preservation, genetic counseling, physical and occupational therapy, nutrition, and psychosocial support, along with medical expertise in tailoring cancer-directed therapy and symptom management.

Reducing Breast Cancer Incidence in AYAs

One of the most important aspects of evaluating the risk of breast cancer in this age group is family history. Although our current guidelines call for starting mammographic screening at age 40, the other consideration is if a woman has a first-degree relative, especially her mother, diagnosed with premenopausal breast cancer. This patient should start screening 10 years prior to that relative's diagnosis. So, if a woman's mother was diagnosed at age 42, for example, she should start mammography screening at age 32.

Metastatic Breast cancer (MBC)

More than 150,000 women in this country are living with metastatic breast cancer (MBC), and 3 in 4 of them had initially been diagnosed with an earlier stage of breast cancer.¹ Metastatic, or stage IV, breast cancer is when cancer cells have spread from the breast to distant parts of the body. Women with MBC have distinct challenges that greatly affect their physical and mental health. – *Centers for Disease Control*

The BRCA1 and BRCA2 Genes

The breast cancer 1 (BRCA1) and breast cancer 2 (BRCA2) genes are the genes most commonly affected in hereditary breast and ovarian cancer. Normally, the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes protect you from getting certain cancers. But certain mutations in the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes prevent them from working properly, so that if you inherit one of these mutations, you are more likely to get breast, ovarian, and other cancers. You and your family members are more likely to have a BRCA1 or BRCA2 mutation if your family has a strong history of breast or ovarian cancer. Because BRCA1 and BRCA2 mutations are inherited, family members with BRCA1 or BRCA2 mutations usually share the same mutation. – *Centers for Disease Control*

For more information on young women and metastatic breast cancer visit [Living Beyond Breast Cancer](#).

For more information on BRCA1 and BRCA2 Genes visit [Genetic Testing for Hereditary Breast and Ovarian Cancer](#)

To learn more about hereditary breast cancer visit [FORCE Facing Hereditary Cancer EMPOWERED](#).