



A guide to asking important questions along the breast cancer pathway: Of particular relevance to women aged 70+ diagnosed with breast cancer

- Researchers have found that the treatment older patients with breast cancer receive is often varied and different to that of younger patients.
- The National Audit of Breast Cancer in Older Patients (NABCOP) was set up to determine if treatment for older patients is consistent with recommended practice and to identify where there are differences compared with younger patients.
- If you are a **woman aged 70+** diagnosed with breast cancer, we hope this guide will be of particular help. We suggest to **use it with your clinical nurse specialist (CNS)** to talk about some important **topics throughout your care.**

The picture to the right shows the sequence of steps in a typical breast cancer pathway, from diagnosis to treatment, in English and Welsh hospitals.

Over the page you will find information on each of these steps in the pathway along with some prompts for questions you may find useful to ask as a woman aged 70+.

Multidisciplinary team (MDT) meeting

To discuss treatment options



The exact breast cancer treatment(s), and order in which they are given will be tailored to each individual patient and their needs.

Diagnosis of breast cancer

Breast cancer treatments:

Surgery

Surgery includes having an operation to the breast and possibly removing some or all lymph nodes from the armpit (axilla).

Other treatments

These include:

- chemotherapy
- radiotherapy
- hormone (endocrine) therapy
- biological (targeted) therapy
- bisphosphonates

Follow-up

Follow-up can be in the form of regular mammograms or clinic visits (or both), to make sure you are well after finishing your treatment.



Supporting you through treatment

Supportive care services are available throughout your care and beyond

Please note: This pathway has been simplified for general use by all patients and not all patients will receive all treatments described. Your individual treatment plan will be discussed with you by the breast cancer team.



Below you can write down any thoughts or questions you might have, as you go through the steps on the next page:

Find out more

- ❖ If you would like to know more about the NABCOP, please visit our FAQs page: <https://www.nabcop.org.uk/about/faq/public/>
- ❖ For copies of our Public and Patient reports please visit <https://www.nabcop.org.uk/reports/>
- ❖ For more detailed information about breast cancer treatment please see the Breast Cancer Now website: <https://breastcancernow.org/information-support/facing-breast-cancer/going-through-breast-cancer-treatment>

This guide has been developed in collaboration with members of:



Diagnosis of breast cancer

When your breast cancer was diagnosed, you would have had a breast examination, imaging of your breasts, and a tissue sample or 'biopsy' taken.

A NABCOP Fitness Assessment Form should be completed for you.

The results from these investigations will be reviewed in a multidisciplinary team (MDT) meeting where specialists will discuss what treatments are available to treat your specific breast cancer.



Supporting you through treatment (& decision making)

Your breast care team are there to help and support you through your diagnosis and treatment. The questions to the right may help you to work through any concerns you may have before or during treatment.



Surgery

This will involve an operation to the breast and possibly to the axilla (armpit). The NABCOP has found that fewer older women have surgery for breast cancer compared with younger women, and so it is important to ask your breast surgeon whether you are a candidate for surgical treatment. If surgery is not an option, you may be offered hormonal (endocrine) therapy as an alternative.



(Neo) Adjuvant therapy

Adjuvant therapies are additional treatments you may be offered for breast cancer. Some might be offered *before* your surgery and are called 'neoadjuvant therapy'. You should discuss with your breast cancer team if this is an option for you.



Follow-up

Your breast unit will organise appropriate follow-up for you. This may be clinic appointments, telephone consultations or an open access service. The type of follow-up appointments and how often they are organised will depend on your hospital and what treatment(s) you received. After the 5 years of annual follow-up mammograms, if you are aged 71 and over you will not automatically be invited for breast screening. You can still have breast screening every 3 years if you want to. To make an appointment, call your local breast screening service.

Questions to ask your breast care team:

- What size is my breast cancer, according to my test results?
- Has my cancer spread e.g. to the armpit nodes?
- How is my general health & fitness for treatment assessed?
- Is surgery an option for my breast cancer?

The items below should be recorded about your breast cancer. Ask your breast cancer team if these have been recorded in national cancer data for you:

- ✓ **Estrogen/progesterone receptor status**
- ✓ **HER2 status** (if you have invasive breast cancer)
- ✓ **Nodal stage** (spread to armpit lymph nodes)
- ✓ **Tumour grade**
- ✓ **Tumour size**
- ✓ **Information collected on your general health and fitness for receiving treatment**



Questions to ask your breast care team:

- What are my treatment options/do I have to have treatment?
- How will treatment affect my day to day activities?
- Are there any clinical trials which I could consider?
- What support is available for me if I am a carer for others?
- Who can I talk to for help with my mental health?
- Is there any financial support available for me?

Questions to ask your breast surgeon:

- How can I prepare myself physically & mentally for surgery?
- What are the pros & cons of having a lumpectomy over a mastectomy?
- Is breast reconstruction an option for me?
- How does recovery from this surgery compare to joint replacement surgery?
- What can I do to help myself recover from surgery?
- What are the risks of needing another operation?

Questions to ask your breast oncologist:

- What therapy is best for my breast cancer?
- Am I a candidate for chemotherapy, radiotherapy or any other treatments?
- Will the treatment be in the form of tablets, injections or...?
- When will my therapy start and how long will it last?
- What are the side effects of the therapy?
- How will I know if the treatment is working?

Questions to ask your breast care team:

- How often will you see me to check I'm ok?
- Where can I find support on adapting to life after breast cancer?
- What are the signs I should look out for of my breast cancer returning?

Questions to ask your breast care team, if your breast cancer has come back after treatment (you have a recurrence):

- Has information on my breast cancer recurrence been recorded in the national cancer data?
- What treatments are available for me?
- What support is available to me?