

Inflammatory breast cancer and common treatments (Source: NCI)

Inflammatory breast cancer (IBC) is a rare but very aggressive type of breast cancer in which the cancer cells block the lymph vessels in the skin of the breast. This type of breast cancer is called "inflammatory" because the breast often looks swollen and red, or "inflamed." IBC accounts for 1 to 5 percent of all breast cancer cases in the United States.

Symptoms

Inflammatory breast cancer often does not include a distinct lump in the breast, so it is important to be aware of the symptoms, which may include:

- Skin of the breast appearing red, pink, reddish purple, or bruised
- Skin having ridges or appearing pitted, like the skin of an orange (called peau d'orange)
- Swelling, warmth, heaviness, burning, aching and/or tenderness
- Increase in breast size
- A nipple that is inverted (facing inward)

These symptoms usually develop quickly, over a period of weeks or months. Swollen lymph nodes may also be present under the arm, above the collarbone, or in both places. However, it is important to note that these symptoms may also be signs of other conditions such as infection, injury, or other types of cancer.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis of IBC is based primarily on the results of a doctor's clinical examination. Biopsy, mammogram, and breast ultrasound are used to confirm the diagnosis.

Treatment

Treatment consisting of chemotherapy, targeted therapy, surgery, radiation therapy and hormonal therapy is used to treat IBC:

- **Chemotherapy** - Chemotherapy (anticancer drugs) is generally the first treatment for patients with IBC, and is called neoadjuvant therapy. The purpose of chemotherapy is to control or kill cancer cells, including those that may have spread to other parts of the body.
- **Surgery and Radiation Therapy** - After chemotherapy, patients with IBC may undergo surgery and radiation therapy to the chest wall. Both radiation and surgery are local treatments that affect only cells in the tumor and the immediately surrounding area. The purpose of surgery is to remove the tumor from the body, while the purpose of radiation therapy is to destroy remaining cancer cells. Surgery to remove the breast (or as much of the breast tissue as possible) is called a mastectomy. Lymph node dissection (removal of the lymph nodes in the underarm area for examination under a microscope) is also done during this surgery.

Additional Treatments: Chemotherapy, Hormonal Therapy, Targeted Therapy - After initial systemic and local treatment, patients with IBC may receive additional systemic treatments to reduce the risk of recurrence (cancer coming back). Such treatments may include additional chemotherapy, hormonal therapy (treatment that interferes with the effects of the female hormone estrogen, which can promote the growth of breast cancer cells), targeted therapy (such as trastuzumab, also known as Herceptin®), or all three. Trastuzumab is administered to patients whose tumors overexpress the HER-2 tumor protein.

Patients may also receive supportive care to help manage the side effects of the cancer and its treatment.

To see a video on IBC, go to <http://www.komotv.com/ibc/>

Information provided by [National Breast Cancer Awareness Month](#) website.