

Information & Resources



Glossary of pathology terms

The doctors talk to you as if you know the terminology when they explain the results. Because they use them every day, they might not stop to think that women don't understand these terms. -- Julie, TAS.

Reading your pathology report can be scary and confusing, and the words can seem like a completely different language. In addition, different laboratories may use different words to describe the same thing. We have compiled a list of common terms used in pathology reporting, to make understanding your report a little easier.

Axilla – the armpit.

Axillary lymph nodes – lymph nodes in your armpit.

Benign – not cancerous.

Biopsy – removal of cells or tissue from the body for examination by a pathologist to determine whether or not they are cancer.

Carcinoma – another word for cancer.

Clear margins – (see Margins) - when the edge of the healthy-looking tissue surrounding the tumour is free of cancer cells.

Close margins – (see Margins) - When the healthy-looking tissue surrounding the tumour has cancer cells close to the edge or within it. If the margins are close, further surgery may be required to remove more tissue.

Ductal Carcinoma in situ (DCIS) – non-invasive breast cancer that is contained within the milk ducts (see diagram below)

Fluorescence In Situ Hybridisation test (FISH) – a test that is used to measure the number of HER2 genes in a cancer. A cancer with too many HER2 genes is called HER2-positive. Other methods for assessing these genes are called CISH or SISH

Gene – A part of the body's code for making new cells and controlling the growth and repair of the cells.

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HER2 – a receptor situated on the cell and which is involved in the control of the growth of the cancer cell. These receptors are present in around 15-20% of breast cancers. The pathologist tests for these in the laboratory by in situ hybridisation (FISH, CISH or SISH – see Fluorescence In Situ Hybridisation test above) using a sample of the breast cancer. If the receptors are present (HER2 positive) it may be possible to block them in some patients using drugs such as Herceptin or Tykerb.

Hormone receptors – Tiny receptors in cells that attract and bind hormones that circulate in the blood. Hormone receptors affect whether the cancer cell growth is influenced by hormones such as oestrogen and progesterone. These receptors can be blocked by specific drug therapy such as Tamoxifen. The pathologist assesses whether these receptors are present using a sample of the breast cancer in the laboratory.

Invasive/Infiltrating cancer – cancer that has spread beyond the area in the breast where it started into surrounding healthy breast tissue. These cells can also spread outside the breast to lymph nodes in the armpit or even further to other organs such as liver and lung.

Invasive ductal carcinoma – a type of breast cancer that has spread from the ducts of the breast into the surrounding breast tissue (see diagram below).

Invasive lobular carcinoma – a type of breast cancer whose cells resemble the cells of the breast lobule(see diagram below).

Lobular Carcinoma in situ (LCIS) – non-invasive breast cancer that is contained within the lobules (milk-making part) of the breast. See diagram below,

Lymphatic invasion – cancer cells that have been found in the lymph vessels.

Lymph nodes – glands in the armpit and other parts of the body that filter and drain lymph fluid, trapping bacteria, cancer cells and any other particles that could be harmful to the body.

Lymphatic vessels – tiny vessels next to blood vessels that collect fluid and waste products from the body's tissues.

Margins (also referred to as surgical margins) – a thin band of healthy-looking tissue surrounding the tumour that is removed along with the tumour during surgery. A pathologist will look at the edge of the margins to determine if all the cancerous cells have been removed.

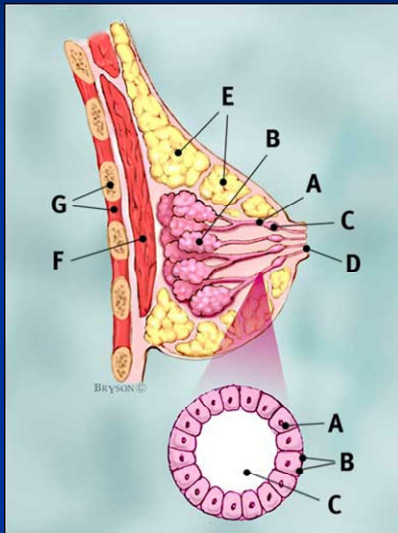
Oestrogen – a type of female hormone.

Progesterone – a type of female hormone.

Sentinel node/s – the first lymph node/s that cancer is likely to spread to from the place where it started.

Vascular invasion – cancer cells have been found in the blood vessels.

The Breast



- **Breast profile:**
 - A Ducts
 - B Lobules
 - C Dilated section of duct to hold milk
 - D Nipple
 - E Fat
 - F Pectoralis major muscle
 - G Chest wall/rib cage
- **Enlargement**
 - A Normal duct cells
 - B Basement membrane
 - C Lumen (centre of duct)

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