

Paget's Disease of the Nipple

What is Paget's disease of the nipple?

Paget's disease of the nipple is a rare type of cancer that forms in or around the nipple. It accounts for less than 5 percent of all breast cancers. It can occur in both women and men, most often in those age 50 and older. People who have Paget's disease of the nipple often have breast cancer elsewhere in the breast, usually in the breast ducts.

What causes it?

The causes of Paget's disease of the nipple are unknown, but there are two theories:

1. Cancer cells break off from a tumor inside the breast and move through the milk ducts to the nipple.
2. Skin cells of the nipple become cancer cells without any warning.

Signs & symptoms

- Itching, burning, redness and scaling of the skin on the nipple and areola, the more darker shaded circle of skin around the nipple
- Bleeding or oozing from the nipple and areola
- Nipple may appear flattened against the breast
- About half the time there is also a lump in the breast

Diagnosis

Paget's disease of the nipple is often mistaken for eczema, which is much more common. Eczema is an itchy, red skin rash that is not cancer. Paget's disease and eczema can look alike. Paget's disease, though, most often affects only one nipple and doesn't go away after using common eczema treatments.



Photo Courtesy of Dr. Marilyn Leitch, Department of Surgery, UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas.

A biopsy is the only way to diagnose Paget's disease of the nipple. A clinical breast exam and a mammogram may also be recommended to check for breast cancer elsewhere in the breast.

How is Paget's disease of the nipple treated?

The treatment for Paget's disease of the nipple depends on the type and extent of the cancer. Surgery is the most common treatment. A lumpectomy may be done if the cancer is non-invasive and close to the nipple. Radiation therapy is almost always given afterward. A mastectomy may be done if the cancer is far from the nipple. Chemotherapy is sometimes used after mastectomy.

The expected outcome (prognosis) for Paget's disease of the nipple is good if it stays within the nipple and breast ducts. The survival rate is lower if the cancer has spread to other parts of the breast or body.

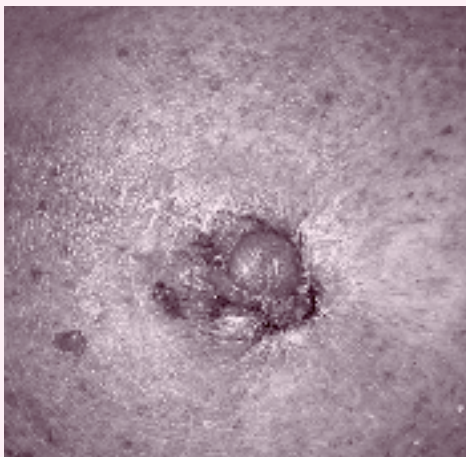


Photo Courtesy of Dr. Marilyn Leitch, Department of Surgery, UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas.

Clinical Trials

You may want to think about taking part in a clinical trial. Some new treatments are only available through a clinical trial. Also, taking part can help researchers learn more about this type of breast cancer and how to treat it.

Resources

Organizations

American Cancer Society
1-800-ACS-2345
www.cancer.org

Breast Cancer[™] Network of Strength
1-800-221-2141
www.networkofstrength.org

National Cancer Institute
1-800-4-CANCER
www.cancer.gov

Internet

National Cancer Institute (NCI) Fact Sheet –
Paget's Disease
www.cancer.gov

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