

Breast cancer Essential TNM

Key points for breast cancer staging

1. Metastasis is common to the bone, lung, and brain. Look for evidence on imaging.
2. Remember that lymph nodes on the opposite (i.e. contralateral) side or in the neck are distant metastases (M+).
3. If M+, Stage IV can be assigned and there is no need to look for further information.
4. Look for tumour extension to breast skin (epidermis).
5. Regional lymph nodes are the axillary (including intramammary), infraclavicular, internal mammary, and supraclavicular nodes **on the same side as the tumour** (see the diagrams in Fig. 4).
6. If lymph node involvement (R+) has been established but no further information is available about the number and location of nodes, R+ is assumed. In such a situation, the case will be allotted to the lower stage category (following Rule 4 of the TNM system), for example to Stage II Regional Limited.
7. Size of the tumour is a critical aspect, and a tumour that measures 2 cm or less is very limited (Stage I).
8. If two malignant tumours are present in the same breast, use the biggest one to stage.

Fig. 4. Breast cancer Essential TNM flow chart. A, advanced extension; L, localized extension; M, distant metastasis; R, regional lymph nodes; TNM, Tumour, Node, Metastasis.

