# **Liver Metastatic Breast Cancer**

Subjects: Endocrinology & Metabolism

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The median overall survival of patients with metastatic breast cancer is only 2–3 years, and for patients with untreated liver metastasis, it is as short as 4-8 months. Improving the survival of women with breast cancer requires more effective anti-cancer strategies, especially for metastatic disease. Nutrients can influence tumor microenvironments, and cancer metabolism can be manipulated via dietary modification to enhance anti-cancer strategies. Yet, there are no standard evidence-based recommendations for diet therapies before or during cancer treatment, and few studies provide definitive data that certain diets can mediate tumor progression or therapeutic effectiveness in human cancer. This review focuses on metastatic breast cancer, in particular liver metastatic forms, and recent studies on the impact of diets on disease progression and treatment.

breast cancer liver metastasis

western diet fasting-mimicking diet

#### 1. Introduction

Data from the American Cancer Society estimate that there will be 1.9 million new cancer cases diagnosed and 608.570 cancer deaths in the US in 2021 [1]. For women in the US, breast cancer is the most common cancer (30%) of all new cases), with an estimated 281,550 newly diagnosed cases and 43,600 deaths in 2021  $^{[1]}$ . In 2018, an estimated 3.7 million women were living with breast cancer in the US [2]. Furthermore, global breast cancer mortality is increasing substantially, especially in developing regions such as Latin America and the Caribbean, rising by an estimated 7 million deaths every five years 3. These trends demonstrate a need for continued efforts to abate a serious public health concern.

One emerging approach to intervene on breast cancer outcomes is the use of targeted dietary interventions. Indeed, accumulating data indicate that practical clinical dietary interventions, such as the ketogenic diet, can improve the efficacy of anticancer therapy [4]. Thus, dietary approaches hold potential to enhance therapeutic effectiveness and improve overall survival in breast cancer patients, thereby offering new promise for clinical practice that can change outcomes for a substantial number of patients worldwide.

Here, we review studies demonstrating how diet impacts disease progression and treatment in metastatic breast cancer, particularly metastases to the liver.

### 2. Breast Cancer Metastasis

Approximately 63% of breast cancer patients are diagnosed with local-stage breast cancer, 27% with regionalstage disease, and 6% with distant (metastatic) disease [1]. In the US, an estimated >168,000 women were living with metastatic breast cancer in 2020 [5]. Although metastatic disease accounts for a small percentage of breast cancer cases, metastatic tumors are responsible for more than 90% of all cancer-related deaths [6]. Indeed, among breast cancer cases, the five-year survival rate for those with localized disease is more than 90%, but for those with metastases, the rate falls to just 28% [7]. Furthermore, the median survival of patients with metastatic disease at the time of diagnosis is approximately 18–24 months, and roughly 13% will survive 10 years [8]. About one-third of women diagnosed early with non-metastatic breast cancer will ultimately develop metastatic disease [9], which tends to develop resistance to therapies [10]. These phenomena underscore the increasing importance of developing therapies to prevent and treat metastatic disease and thus improve the overall survival of women with breast cancer [6].

The sites of distant metastasis among stage IV breast cancer patients include bone (68.8%), lung (16.0%), liver (13.3%), and brain (1.9%) [11]. Based on limited therapy options and dire disease outcomes for patients with liver metastasis, we will focus on liver metastatic ER+ breast cancer in this review. Important data on the impact of the location of metastases on patient survival come from the National Cancer Institute's Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results (SEER), a network of tumor registries that include about 30% of the US population and harboring data from 1975 to 2017 [9]. Of the 2.4 million cancer patients within this database, 5.14% present with synchronous liver metastases (LM) [19],[12]]. Half of all breast cancer patients develop LM, which often carries poor survival [13]—as low as 4–8 months if the disease is left untreated [14]. Surprisingly, metastatic breast cancer in the liver is observed more frequently in younger women (occurring in 34.2% of all patients < 50 years) than in older women (occurring in 8.9% of all patients  $\geq$  50 years) [15],[16]]. In addition, patients with hormone receptor (HR)+/HER2+ breast cancer with LM have longer median survival than patients with HR+/HER2- and triple-negative breast cancer due to the introduction of HER2-targeted therapy [17],[18]]. Thus, liver metastatic disease represents an important subgroup of breast cancer diagnoses that warrants focused efforts to improve outcomes.

## 3. Breast Cancer Liver Metastasis Diagnosis, Therapies, and Potential Treatments

Breast cancer LM may at first be asymptomatic, but possible symptoms include fatigue and weakness, pain or discomfort in the mid-section, weight loss or poor appetite, swelling in the legs, fever, and/or a yellow tint to the skin or whites of the eyes [19]. It is often identified by liver function tests that detect liver disease or damage [20]. Diagnosis may also be facilitated through imaging (MRI (magnetic resonance imaging), CT (computed tomography), PET (positron emission tomography), and PET/CT) or biopsy [21].

Most patients with breast cancer LM are treated with either systemic medications or local treatment <sup>[22]</sup>. Chemotherapy, hormonal therapies, or targeted therapies are common systemic treatments <sup>[23]</sup>. Chemotherapy involves the use of anti-cancer drugs to destroy or damage cancer cells <sup>[24]</sup>. Hormonal therapies use drugs such as tamoxifen, aromatase inhibitors, and fulvestrant to target estrogen and help shrink or slow the growth of HR+ metastatic breast cancer <sup>[25][26][27]</sup> Targeted therapies exploit specific characteristics of cancer cells to treat metastatic disease. Some common targeted therapeutics are everolimus, bevacizumab+paclitaxel, palbociclib, and ribociclib <sup>[28][29][30][31][32][33]</sup>. Table 1 describes more current options such as potential oral selective estrogen receptor degraders or other pathway inhibitors. Local treatments for breast cancer LM include surgery, radiation therapy, and local chemotherapy. Surgery is most often used when the liver is the only site of metastasis and the

symptoms are severe. Radiation therapies such as stereotactic body radiation therapy and Y-90 (Yttrium 90) radioembolization deliver or target radiation therapy directly to tumors in the liver [34],[35].

Endocrine therapies reduce breast cancer mortality and relieve symptoms, but some persistent tumor cells frequently develop resistance in the metastatic and adjuvant setting [<sup>[36][37][38]</sup>]. Liver metastatic estrogen receptor α (ΕRα)-positive breast cancer is currently incurable [<sup>39]</sup>. Some potential small molecule therapies show good tumor responses in metastatic breast cancers. Axl kinase is associated with aggressive migratory behavior in tumors in a mouse model, and a combination of R428, a selective small molecule Axl inhibitor, with cisplatin positively reinforces both agents to block liver micro-metastases [<sup>40]</sup>. VERU-111 acts by depolymerizing microtubules, often leading to cell apoptosis due to the inability to complete mitosis, and is highly effective, especially against fibrous tumors and metastases [<sup>41]</sup>. Recent evidence indicates that ErSO, a small molecule activator of a stress response mechanism that stimulates the anticipatory unfolded protein response (a-UPR), can eradicate most lung, bone, and liver metastases in orthotopic cell line xenograft and patient-derived xenograft (PDX) mouse models [<sup>39]</sup>.

**Table 1.** Selected Oral Selective Estrogen Receptor Degraders or Other Inhibitors in Clinical Investigation.

Therapy	Administration	Target	Combination	Status	Year
Everolimus [42]	Oral	mTOR	Not noted	FDA approved	2020
Alpelisib [ <sup>28</sup> ],	Oral	PI3K-alpha	Combination with fulvestrantor letrozole	FDA approved	2020
Elacestrant [43]	Oral	Estrogen receptor	Low-fat diet combination	Phase Ib	2020
Giredestrant [44]	Oral	Estrogen receptor	Not noted	Phase III	2021
AZD9833 <sup>[45]</sup>	Oral	Estrogen receptor	Not noted	Phase I	2020

## 4. Link between Diets and Metastatic Breast Cancer

weight women [59]60]61[62]63]
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with breast cancer liver metastasis fed sugar-rich diets had a high metastatic burden, while mice fed high-fat/low-

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Advanced Breast Cancers. *Cancer Cell* **2018**, *34*, 427-438.e6, 10.1016/j.ccell.2018.08.008. 4.3. β-Hydroxybutyrate Paradox

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42. Claudio Vernieri; Francesca Corti; Federico Nichetti; Francesca Ligorio; Sara Manglaviti; Emma βHB has anti-inflammatory properties [122], [125] and is characterized as an epigenetic modifier that produces anti-Zattarin; Carmen G. Rea; Giuseppe Capri; Giulia V. Bianchi; Filippo De Braud; et al. Everolimus cancer effects by modifying chromatin and inhibiting histone deacetylases [126], [127]. However, some studies link versus alpelisib in advanced hormone receptor-positive HEB2-negative breast cancer: targeting βHB to tumor progression, metastasis, and clinical failure [128] [126] [137]. These inverse effects gave rise to the different nodes of the PI3K/AKT/mTORC1 pathway with different clinical implications. Breast "β-hydroxybutyrate paradox" theory [128].

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