

Important Information You Need to Know About Breast Cancer



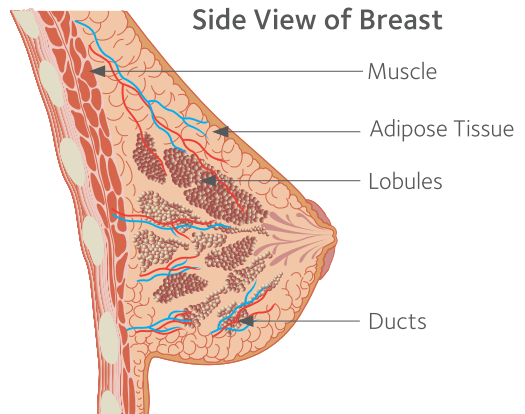
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Important Information You Need to Know About Breast Cancer

Q: What makes up the breast?

A: The breast is made up of millions of cells. It consists of fatty tissue and lobules (about 15-20) that are connected to the nipple through milk ducts.



Q: What is breast cancer?

A: Breast cancer is a malignant (cancerous) growth that begins in the tissues of the breast. It develops when abnormal cells begin to multiply out of control and form a tumor. Some cells may break away and travel to other parts of the body starting new tumors.

Breast cancer can occur in both men and women, but it is far more common in women and the number of cases is rising. However, early detection saves lives.

Q: What are the risk factors for breast cancer?

A: It is not clear what causes breast cancer. It is known that breast cancer occurs when some breast cells begin growing abnormally. The accumulating cells form a tumor that may spread through the breast, to the near lymph nodes and other parts of the body. Studies suggest that breast cancer is caused by a complex combination of genetic and environmental risk factors.

Risk factors you cannot change (genetic factors):

- **Age:** your risk of developing breast cancer increases as you get older.
- **Family History:** you have a higher risk of breast cancer if you have a close relative who had breast or ovarian cancer. If you have a strong family history and are worried about your risk, discuss this with your primary doctor. If appropriate, you will be referred to a genetic counselor.

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- **Menstrual cycle:** Women who got their periods early (before age 12) or went through menopause late (after age 55) have an increased risk for breast cancer, because these women have had a longer lifetime exposure to estrogen.
 - **Personal history of breast cancer:** a woman with breast cancer has a high risk of developing a new cancer in the other breast or in another part of the same breast.
 - **Previous chest radiotherapy:** Women, who as children or young adults, had chest radiotherapy for another cancer, have a significantly increased risk for breast cancer.

Risk factors you can change (environmental factors):

- **Alcohol intake and smoking:** drinking alcohol or smoking increases the risk of breast cancer. The more you drink or smoke each day, the greater your risk becomes.
- **Childbirth:** women who have never had children or who had them after age 30 have a higher risk for breast cancer. The more children a woman has, the lower her risk of breast cancer. Being younger when you have your children also decreases your risk.
- **Childbirth control pills (contraceptive pills):** taking oral contraceptives may slightly increases your risk, but it will gradually return to normal after you stop taking the pills.
- **Hormone Replacement Therapy:** Your risk increases the longer you take the Hormone Replacement Therapy and decreases gradually after you stop taking it.
- **Obesity:** being overweight after menopause increases a woman's risk of breast cancer, as body fat affects hormone levels.
- **Not breast-feeding:** the longer a woman breastfeeds her children, the lower her risk of breast cancer.
- **Physical activity:** women who are physically active have a lower risk of breast cancer than less active women.

What changes should I look for?

It is often that women themselves who first discover the breast cancer. Most changes are not caused by cancer, but it is very important to report anything unusual to your doctor. Look for:

- Lump, hard knot or thickening inside the breast or underarm area or over the skin.
- Change in the size or shape of the breast.
- Swelling, warmth, redness or darkening of the breast.
- Pitting of the skin over your breast, like the skin of an orange.
- Changes to the skin over the breast, such as dimpling, prominent veins.
- Itchy, burning sensation, sore, or rash on the nipple.
- Nipple discharge that starts suddenly, that may be clear, bloody or another color.
- pulling in of your nipple.
- New pain in one spot that does not go away.

Q: What examinations are used to screen for breast cancer?

- Clinical breast exam.
- Mammogram (the most common method).
- Breast ultrasound
- Breast magnetic resonance imaging (MRI).
- Taking a sample of breast cells for testing (biopsy).

Q: What are the treatment options for breast cancer?

A: There are different types of treatment for patients with breast cancer, based on the type of breast cancer. Most breast cancer patients undergo surgery and receive additional treatment, such as chemotherapy, hormone therapy or radiation therapy.



Important messages to remember:

“Early Detection Saves Lives” Breast cancer can affect anyone, so it is important to be “breast aware” and follow simple ways to protect yourself:

- Know what is normal for you
- Be familiar with your breasts by:
 - * Look at and feel your breasts
 - * Know what changes to look for
- Report any changes without delay
- Ask your doctor about breast cancer screening
- Maintain a healthy weight and exercise regularly
- Eat a healthy balanced food
- Quit bad habits e.g. smoking, drinking alcohol, etc.



**Early Detection Saves Lives
Together we will beat cancer**

Breast Cancer Screening Program

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