

Navigating Breast Cancer Awareness, Prevention, and Empowerment



WHAT IS CANCER?

Cancer is a large group of diseases that can start in almost any organ or tissue of the body when abnormal cells grow uncontrollably, go beyond their usual boundaries to invade adjoining parts of the body and/or spread to other organs.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death globally, accounting for an estimated 9.6 million deaths, or 1 in 6 deaths, in 2018. Lung, prostate, colorectal, stomach and liver cancer are the most common types of cancer in men, while breast, colorectal, lung, cervical and thyroid cancer are the most common among women.

WHAT IS BREAST CANCER?

Breast cancer is the most common cancer worldwide and leading cause of cancer death among women – disproportionately affects individuals in low- and middle-income countries. Breast cancer 5-year survival rates in high-income countries exceeds 90%, compared with 66% in India and 40% in South Africa (WHO)

Breast cancer has become the most diagnosed form of cancer globally, accounting for nearly 12% of all cancer cases worldwide, and is the leading cause of cancer deaths among women.

It's important to understand that most breast lumps are benign and not cancer (malignant). Non-cancer breast tumors are abnormal growths, but they do not spread outside of the breast. They are not life threatening, but some types of benign breast lumps can increase a woman's risk of getting breast cancer. Any breast lump or change needs to be checked by a health care professional to find out if it is benign or malignant (cancer) and if it might affect your future cancer risk.



Breast cancer risk factors¹

Being a Woman: Being a woman, or a person assigned female at birth, is one of the most important risk factors for developing breast cancer.

Age: As with many other diseases, your risk of breast cancer goes up as you get older. About two out of three invasive breast cancers are found in women 55 or older.

Family History: Women with close relatives — especially sisters, mothers, or daughters — who have been diagnosed with breast cancer have a higher risk of developing the disease.

Genetics: About 5% to 10% of breast cancers are thought to be hereditary, caused by abnormal genes passed from parent to child.

Personal History of Breast Cancer: If you've been diagnosed with breast cancer, you're three to four times more likely to develop a new cancer in the other breast or a different part of the same breast.

Radiation to Chest or Face Before Age 30: If you had radiation to the chest or face to treat another cancer or acne, you have a higher-than-average risk of breast cancer.

Certain Breast Changes: If you've been diagnosed with certain benign (not cancer) breast conditions, you may have a higher risk of breast cancer.

Race/Ethnicity: White women are slightly more likely to develop breast cancer than Black, Hispanic, and Asian women. But Black women are more likely to develop more aggressive, more advanced-stage breast cancer diagnosed at a young age.

Being Overweight: Overweight and obese women have a higher risk of being diagnosed with breast cancer compared to women who maintain a healthy weight, especially after menopause.

Pregnancy History: Your age when you give birth to your first child and the number of times you've given birth — including if you've never had a full-term pregnancy — can affect your risk of developing breast cancer.

Breast-feeding History: Breast-feeding can lower breast cancer risk, especially if you breast feed for longer than one year.

Menstrual History: Women who had their first period before they turned 12 have a higher risk of breast cancer later in life.

Using HRT (Hormone Replacement Therapy): Some types of HRT can increase your risk of breast cancer.

Drinking Alcohol: Research shows that drinking alcoholic beverages of any kind increases a woman's risk of hormone receptor-positive breast cancer.

Dense Breasts: Women with dense breasts have a higher risk of developing breast cancer.

Lack of Exercise: Research shows a link between exercising regularly at a moderate or intense level for four to seven hours per week and a lower risk of breast cancer.

Smoking: Smoking is linked to a higher risk of breast cancer in younger, pre-menopausal women.

Women at high risk of developing breast cancer must consult with their doctor to establish screening recommendations particular to their case.

Screening

The best way to find breast cancer is as early as possible — especially for people who have no symptoms — is by getting regular breast cancer screenings. Early detection makes it easier for doctors to treat breast cancer.

Breast self-examination (BSE) BSE is a visual and tactile examination of the breast performed by the individual to assess the presence of persistent changes or abnormalities, thereby helping the individual learn over time what looks and feels normal for her.

¹ <https://www.breastcancer.org/risk/risk-factors>



Preventing breast cancer

There are things that all women can do to reduce risk and put the odds in their favor if diagnosed with Breast Cancer.

Early detection is the best defense.

During a BSE, the individual inspects her breasts in the mirror, looking for:

- Asymmetries
- Puckering
- Dimpling, or
- Localized skin changes

Then feels the entire breast and armpits with the arm and shoulder extended to flatten the breast on the chest wall.

The American Cancer Society recommends the following for screenings:

- **40 to 44:** High-risk people in this age group should get screened.
- **45 to 54:** Yearly screening.
- **Over 55:** Screening every 2 years



Signs and symptoms of breast cancer

A lump is one of the most common signs and symptoms of breast cancer, but symptoms vary and can also include swelling, skin dimpling, and breast or nipple pain. It's also important to know that some lumps might be too small for you to feel and that even a large lump can be benign.

If you do have symptoms, they could include:

1. New lumps or thickening in the breast, especially if in only one breast.
2. Nipple sores, change in shape of the nipple.
3. Nipple discharge or turning in.
4. Changes in the size or shape of the breast
5. Skin of the breast dimpling
6. Discomfort or swelling in the armpit.
7. Rash or red swollen breasts
8. Ongoing pain that is not related to your menstrual cycle that remains after your period and occurs in only one breast

Lifestyle factors that can also slightly increase the risk of breast cancer in men and women include:



Being overweight



Not enough physical activity



Drinking alcohol



There is also an association with some benign breast disease and past exposure to radiation

Can breast cancer be prevented?

You may not be able to prevent breast cancer. But you can reduce your risk by doing the following:

- **Regular self-exams and mammograms** can help detect breast cancer early
- **Healthy Weight**
- **Healthy Diet.** Some studies show a diet that includes vegetables, fruit, calcium-rich dairy foods and lean protein may reduce your risk of breast cancer. Avoiding red meat and processed meat may also reduce your risk.
- **Physical Activity** lowers breast cancer risk
- **Avoid beverages** containing alcohol



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