



Women's Health: Breast Cancer

Every three minutes, a woman is diagnosed with breast cancer, the second-leading cause of cancer death in American women. The American Cancer Society also estimates that 2,000 men are diagnosed with the disease every year.

Breast cancer is a disease in which malignant cells form in the tissues of the breast. There are three main types:

- *Ductal carcinoma* – The most common; begins in the cells of the ducts.
- *Lobular carcinoma* – Begins in the lobes and is more often found in both breasts than are other types of breast cancer.
- *Inflammatory breast cancer* – Uncommon type in which the breast is warm, red and swollen.

Causes and Risk Factors

It is unclear as to what specifically triggers breast cells to grow abnormally. Medical experts attribute the development of breast cancer to a combination of both unknown and known factors including genetics, lifestyle choices and reproductive factors, which may include:

- Older age
- The onset of menstruation at an early age
- Family history
- Having dense breast tissue
- Never having given birth, or having first given birth at an older age
- Having radiation therapy to the breast/chest
- Drinking alcoholic beverages

- Taking hormones
- Being Caucasian or African-American

Symptoms and Screenings

The most common indication of breast cancer is discovering a lump in the breast or underarm area. Other signs include:

- Swelling
- Skin irritation/dimpling
- Nipple pain/abnormalities
- Redness or scaly skin
- Discharge from the nipple

It is important to get any areas of concern checked out by a doctor. To detect breast cancer, the following tests and procedures may be used by physicians:

- *Mammogram* – a breast X-ray
- *Biopsy* – the removal of cells or tissues so they can be viewed under a microscope
- *Estrogen and progesterone receptor tests* – to determine the levels of each hormone
- *MRI (magnetic resonance imaging)* – a procedure that uses a magnet, radio waves and a computer to make a series of detailed pictures of inside the body

Prognosis and Treatment

The chance of recovery and the treatment options depend on many factors, including the stage

of cancer, how fast the tumor is growing, hormone receptor levels, and a woman's age and general health. There are four standard types of treatment used for breast cancer:

- *Surgery*, ranging from a small lump of tissue being removed to an entire breast (mastectomy).
- *Radiation therapy* uses high-energy X-rays to kill cancer cells or to prevent their growth.
- *Chemotherapy* uses drugs to stop the growth of cancer cells.
- *Hormone therapy* removes hormones or blocks their action to keep cancer cells from growing.

Prevention

It is important to give yourself monthly breast exams (see box). Other ways to keep breast cancer at bay:

- Limit alcohol and fats.
- Stay physically active.
- Maintain a healthy weight.

Visit www.breastcancer.org or www.komen.org for more information.



Did you know...?

The best way to find breast cancer early is by performing a breast self-exam each month. Start by looking at your breasts in the mirror to see if they look physically different. Next, lie down and use a few fingers in a circular motion to go over each breast. Finally, do the same motion while standing. View the video on www.komen.org or the diagram on www.breastcancer.org for more assistance.