

Breast cancer – what is Breast Cancer?

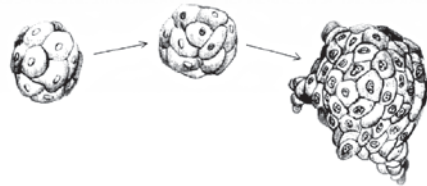
Just the word can be frightening but what is it really? What happens in your body and why is it so hard to diagnose and treat this disease?

The term cancer covers more than a hundred diseases that share one trait that is cells grow out of control and destroy healthy tissues. For women the most common type is breast cancer.

Nearly 80% of findings on mammogram are not cancer. They are usually benign tumors, a cyst or some other non cancerous conditions.

A tumor is defined as cancer only when it can invade near-by-tissues and organs and damage them. Then it is called malignant. If breast cancer spreads, it usually shows up first in the lymph nodes near the armpit. These nodes are part of the lymphatic system, which like the blood circulation system, carries fluids through out the system. The fluid known as lymph may carry cancer cells to other parts of the body, where they can start new tumors.

Abnormal cell growth leading to cancer formation



Breast cancer – what is the risk?

No one knows why some women and even some men get breast cancer whereas others don't, but certain factors increase the risk, such as:

- **Age**- the older you are the higher you are at risk.
- **Gender**- link between breast cancer and the female hormone estrogen.
- **Family history** – if your mother or sister had breast cancer, risk of getting breast cancer increases.
- **Age at birth of 1st child** – who had their child at the age of 30 or later.
- **Controlable risk factors:**
 - Diet
 - Exercise habits

Learn to give yourself breast-self-examination (B.S.E)

Breast Self Examination (B.S.E) is an important step in finding breast cancer early.

If diagnosed and treated at an early stage, the chances of survival are more than 90%. That is why it is very important for you to learn how to examine your breasts properly.

The best time to do B.S.E

Do your Breast Self Examination about a week after the start of your menstrual period, when breasts are not tender or swollen. If you are not always regular, do it on the same day every month. After menopause or hysterectomy, choose a day that is easy to remember, such as the first day of the month. By doing B.S.E regularly you will become familiar with how your breasts feel and will be able to detect a change in your breast tissues.

What should you do if you find a change?

Don't get upset if you feel some lumps or hardness, that's normal. It is also normal if your breasts are not exactly the same size. If you notice a change in your breasts, see your doctor immediately.

Important changes might include:

- Lump in the breasts, which is usually single, firm, and most often painless or local thickened area.
- A portion of the skin on the breast or underarm swells and has an unusual appearance.
- An unusual increase in size of one breast.
- The breast nipple becomes inverted, changes in skin texture, or has a discharge other than breast milk.
- A depression is found in an area of the breast surface.
- Swelling of the upper arm.
- A rash or eczema on the nipple or around it.



How to do breast self-examination (B.S.E)?

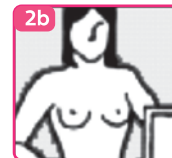
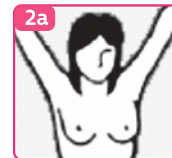
IN THE SHOWER

- Fingers flat, move gently over every part of each breast.
- Use your right hand to examine left breast, left hand for right breast.
- Check for any lump, hard knot or thickening.
- Carefully observe any change in your breasts.



BEFORE A MIRROR

- Stand in front of the mirror with both arms by your side and look closely at both of your breasts.
- Look for changes in size, color or texture (these may be signs of inflammatory breast cancer).
- Look for any changes in contour of each breast, a swelling, a dimpling of skin or changes in the nipple.
- Then rest palm on hips and press firmly to flex your chest muscles. If left and right breast will not exactly match or a dimple becomes apparent, consult physician.



LAYING DOWN

Place pillow under right shoulder & right arm behind your head. With fingers of left hand flat, press right breast gently in small circular motions, moving vertically or in a circular pattern covering the entire breast.

- Pay attention to any change (lumps, bumpy texture, tenderness).
- Use light, medium and firm pressure. Gently press the nipple and check for discharge and changes in the nipple itself.
- After you examine your breast, move to your underarm (lymph node area) and look for changes there.
- Follow the same procedure on your left side. Examine your entire breast and under arm area. If you do notice any changes or lumps, do not panic. Most lumps are benign fibroadenomas or cysts.



Tips

- If you examine your breasts every month, you become familiar with the way they feel and look. That makes it easier to notice any changes.
- Make sure to tell your doctor if you notice any changes in your breasts.

DISCLAIMER

This information contained here is for background purposes only to help you understand breast cancer. You should always consult your physician.

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