

What You Should Know About Breast Cancer

What is breast cancer?

Breast cancer is an abnormal growth (tumor) that forms in the tissues of the breast. It may spread (metastasize) to other areas of the body. Breast cancer usually begins in the ducts (tubes that carry milk to the nipple) or lobules (glands that make milk). The disease can occur in both men and women, although breast cancer in men is less common.

Risks and symptoms

- **Age:** The risk of developing breast cancer increases with age. Two-thirds of all breast cancers are diagnosed in women over the age of 55.
- **Family History:** Breast cancer risk is higher for women who have had a first-degree relative with breast cancer, such as a mother, sister or daughter. The risk is even higher for women with more than one first-degree relative who has had breast cancer before the age of 40 or who has had breast cancer in both breasts.
- **Genetics:** About 5 to 10 percent of breast cancers are thought to be hereditary. The most common cause of hereditary breast cancer is an inherited mutation of the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes. These cancers tend to occur in younger women and more often affect both breasts. Women with these inherited mutations are also at higher risk of developing ovarian or other cancers.
- **Other Risk Factors:** Dense breast tissue, early onset of menstruation (before age 12), late onset of menopause (after age 55), being older than 30 years at birth of first child, never having given birth, obesity, alcohol consumption, physical inactivity, and use of postmenopausal hormones are linked to higher risk.

Early detection and screening

Screening for breast cancer before symptoms occur is important. When breast cancer is detected in its earliest stages, a woman has a greater than 90% chance of remaining cancer-free after five years. Many health-care providers recommend women develop a mammography plan with their care team by the age of 40. After talking with their doctor, some women may choose to begin mammograms earlier than others. These include women who have a history of breast changes or a family history of breast cancer. Tests and procedures that are typically used to find and diagnose breast cancer include:

- **Screening Mammogram:** An X-ray of the breast helps to detect breast disease in women who do not have any symptoms of breast problems. The breast is pressed between 2 plates to flatten and spread the tissue. An X-ray is taken of the breast from different angles. A radiologist views and interprets the result.
- **Diagnostic Mammogram:** A diagnostic mammogram is used to diagnose breast disease in women who have breast symptoms or an abnormal result on a screening mammogram.

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Early detection and screening - continued

- **Clinical Breast Exam (CBE):** A health-care professional examines the breast to check for abnormalities in the shape or texture of the breast, location of any lumps, and whether a lump is attached to the skin or to deeper breast tissue.
- **Breast Ultrasound:** Sound waves are used to target a specific area of concern found on a mammogram. An ultrasound can help distinguish between cysts (fluid-filled sacs under the skin) and solid masses.
- **Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI):** MRI is a diagnostic procedure that scans the breast using magnets and radio waves to produce a detailed, cross-sectional image of the breast.
- **Molecular Breast Imaging (MBI):** A slightly radioactive tracer is injected into a vein. The tracer attaches to breast cancer cells to permit detection by a special camera.
- **Biopsy:** A biopsy is the removal of a small sample of tissue using a needle or surgical excision. A pathologist then examines the extracted tissue to determine if cancerous cells are present. Imaging guidance for the biopsy is provided by ultrasound, stereotactic (X-ray) or MRI.

Treatments

There is not one type of breast cancer, but several different types. As a result, there are many ways to treat breast cancer. It is important for you to speak with a breast cancer specialist to learn more about your disease and to understand the risks and benefits of each treatment option. Treatment options for breast cancer include:

- **Surgery:** Most women have some form of surgery to treat their breast cancer. Surgical options include breast-conserving surgery (such as a lumpectomy to remove a breast lump) and mastectomy (removal of the entire breast). Surgery is also used to remove lymph nodes to determine if the cancer has spread.
- **Radiation Therapy:** This method of treatment uses high-energy radiation directed at the tumor site to kill cancer cells. The extent of radiation depends on whether or not a woman has undergone a lumpectomy or mastectomy and also whether or not lymph nodes were involved.
- **Chemotherapy:** Chemotherapy uses drugs to kill cancer cells. The cancer-killing drugs are typically given intravenously (through a vein) or by mouth. Chemotherapy is typically given in cycles, with rest periods in between. Most cancer patients receive chemotherapy on an outpatient basis.
- **Hormone Therapy:** Hormone therapy is another way to prevent cancer recurrence after surgery. Hormone therapy helps to deprive cancer cells of the hormones needed for growth.
- **Targeted Therapy:** Targeted biologic therapies are drugs that target breast cancer cells that cause cancer. These drugs may be given intravenously or by mouth and are often used in combination with other therapies.

For more information or to find a breast care location near you, call:

Burnsville – Fairview Ridges Hospital - 952-892-2273

Edina – Fairview Southdale Hospital - 952-836-3600

Hibbing – Fairview - University Medical Center - Mesabi - 218-262-4881

Maple Grove – Fairview Maple Grove Medical Center - 763-898-1000

Minneapolis – University of Minnesota Medical Center, Fairview - 612-273-5700

Princeton – Fairview Northland Medical Center - 763-389-6442

Red Wing – Fairview Red Wing Medical Center - 651-267-5000

Wyoming – Fairview Lakes Medical Center - 651-982-7630

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