



# BREAST CANCER



## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

A malignant growth of breast tissue. It is the most common form of cancer in women. Breast cancer is rare before age 30, and is most common after the age of 50. Men can develop breast cancer also.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- No symptoms in early stages. It may be detected by a mammogram or by feeling a breast lump.
- Swelling or lump in the breast.
- Vague discomfort in the breast without true pain.
- Inversion of the nipple.
- Distorted breast contour.
- Dimpled or pitted skin in the breast.
- Enlarged nodes under the arm (late stages).
- Bloody discharge from the nipple (rare).

### CAUSES

Unknown.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Women over 50.
- Women who have not had children or who conceived in the late fertile years.
- Family history of breast cancer (especially mother or sister).
- Benign tumors of the breast (fibrocystic disease).
- Early menstruation, late menopause, or first pregnancy after age 30.
- Previous cancer in one breast.
- Radiation exposure.
- Patients with endometrial or ovarian cancer.
- Studies of estrogen therapy are not conclusive regarding their role in increasing breast cancer risk.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Monthly self-exam of breasts for signs of cancer.
- Obtain medical breast exams as recommended.
- Mammograms every 1 to 2 years starting at age 40 (or as recommended).
- Eat a well-balanced diet that is low in fat. Studies are unclear about a high-fat diet and breast cancer risk.
- If you are pregnant, consider breast-feeding your baby. Women who have breast-fed have a lower incidence of breast cancer.
- A drug, such as tamoxifen, may be prescribed for women at high risk for breast cancer.
- A woman with very high risk may choose to have the breasts removed to avoid breast cancer.

## EXPECTED OUTCOMES

It is curable with early diagnosis and treatment.

## POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Spread to vital organs if not treated early.
- Complications may occur from treatments.



## DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a breast exam and ask questions about your symptoms. A number of medical tests will be done. The tests first help diagnose the cancer and then determine if it has spread (staging).
- Treatment varies and depends on location and size of tumor, any spread of the cancer, your health, age, and preferences. Treatment may include chemotherapy (anticancer drugs) and/or radiation therapy, surgery, and biologic therapy.
- Chemotherapy uses drugs and radiation therapy uses radiation to attack the cancer cells. Biologic therapy uses the body's immune system to fight cancer.
- Surgery may be recommended to remove the lump, breast, lymph glands, lymphatic channels, or muscles under the breast.
- The decision for treatment is very complex and often confusing. Be sure all options are explained and that you understand the risks and benefits of each.
- Counseling may help you cope with having cancer.
- To learn more: National Cancer Institute at (800) 422-6347, website: [www.nci.nih.gov](http://www.nci.nih.gov); Y-Me National Breast Cancer Organization hotline (800) 221-2141, website: [www.y-me.org](http://www.y-me.org); or The American Cancer Society, (800) 227-2345, website: [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org).

### MEDICATIONS

- For minor discomfort, use nonprescription drugs such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen.
- Anticancer drugs, hormones, drugs for biologic therapy, or cortisone drugs may be prescribed.

### ACTIVITY

Physical therapy after surgery may be recommended.

### DIET

Eat a well-balanced diet.



## NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member discovers a lump or other change in the breast.
- New symptoms or concerns develop during or after treatment.

