

## **Breast Cancer: Prevention and Methods of Early Detection**

There is every chance that you, or a family member, colleague, or friend has been affected in some way by breast cancer.

The words 'breast cancer' send a chill of fear down everyone's spine. What is breast cancer and can you prevent it? Here are some facts about breast cancer that every woman should know. You will also learn more about prevention and early detection, especially important if you have a history of cancer in your family.

### **What Should I Know About Breast Cancer?**

There are over two hundred different types of cancer and according to the American Cancer Society breast cancer is the second most common form of cancer in women. While it is also possible for a man to get breast cancer women are 100 times more likely to develop it than men.

There are several forms of breast cancer that occur in different areas of the breast. Most breast cancers are treated with radiation, chemotherapy or surgery. The treatment program determined for any individual depends on the type of cancer, how far it has spread and where it is located. While great strides are taking place in cancer treatment, prevention and early detection are by far the most preferable options.

The statistics are grim. The American Cancer Society reports that 1 in 8 women in the US will experience invasive breast cancer in her lifetime. The chance of dying from breast cancer is one in 33, but that number is decreasing as new forms of treatment and early detection are being implemented.

The good news is that it is possible for women to reduce their risk of dying from breast cancer. When breast cancer is discovered and treated early, the chances for recovery are better.

Women with a high risk should primarily discuss the possible preventive measures currently available with their doctor. However, various simple self-help measures are described below.

### **Who is Most Likely to Get Breast Cancer?**

While every woman has some level of risk there are certain factors that increase the likelihood a person may develop breast cancer. Not having these risk factors does not mean you will not develop cancer just as being at a high risk doesn't mean you will develop cancer.

Smoking, age and family history are the common factors that are assessed when determining risk.

While smoking can be controlled, age and family history cannot. The older you are the greater the risk that you will develop breast cancer – almost 8 out of 10 women diagnosed with breast cancer are over 50. If women in your family developed breast cancer you are also at an increased risk.

Certain genetic changes increase the risk that a woman will develop cancer to as high as 80%. Testing for these changes can help a woman and her doctor discuss preventative measures that might be taken.

Caucasian women have a higher risk of developing breast cancer but African-American women more often die from the disease. Asians, Hispanics and American Indian women are less likely to get it.

Starting your period (menstruation) before age 12 or going through menopause after 55 slightly increases the risk.

<http://www.healthy-info.co.uk/breast-examination.htm>

Having taken the drug DES (diethylstilbestrol), which some women were given in the belief it would prevent them from losing a baby, slightly increases the risk while radiation to the chest earlier in life greatly increases the risk.

Being overweight, use of alcohol, long term use of HRT (hormone replacement therapy) and not having children have all been linked to an increased risk of breast cancer. Using birth control pills may increase the risk and should be discussed with your doctor.

On the other hand exercise, healthy eating (especially reducing the intake of alcohol and red meats) or having had children early in life and breastfeeding for as long as 18 to 24 months have been linked to a reduced risk of developing breast cancer.

### **What Else Can I Do to Reduce the Risk?**

While there are no cures yet, researchers have discovered that a healthy lifestyle is the best way to prevent cancer. Since cancer is a disease that starts in our cells, everything we eat and are exposed to can affect them.

Choose to be a non-smoker and avoid second-hand smoke.

In regards to diet, choose a variety of lower fat, high fiber foods. Studies have shown that intake of total fat, saturated fat and meat are associated with an increased risk of breast cancer. Maintain a healthy body weight and limit alcohol consumption.

Protect yourself from the sun.

At home and at work, follow health and safety instructions when using hazardous materials.

The link between an active lifestyle and breast cancer prevention is as yet unclear but general health is improved when regular exercise is an integral part of a person's lifestyle.

### **Early Detection**

Since early detection is so important it is vital that women learn how to detect lumps in their breasts and understand what precautions must be taken. Those who are more at risk of developing cancer should take extra steps to detect cancer as early as possible.

While a doctor or nurse can show you how to perform a BSE (breast self-exam) the American Cancer Society still recommends that women in their twenties and thirties should have a clinical exam every three years and once a year after 40. In later years most women should also have regular mammograms to catch cancers earlier. But what about the time in between mammograms and clinical exams?

This is when regular self examination is so important.

Every woman should know her own breasts so that any changes are noticed soon and can be checked out by a physician.

Regardless of age, all women should do a monthly breast self-examination a few days after their period. When doing breast self-examination, things to look for include: dimpling or puckering of the skin, swelling, discharges other than milk, bleeding or any other change to the nipple, or the appearance of what is sometimes called 'orange peel skin'.

Any place in your breasts that feels lumpy or harder than the rest needs to be brought to the attention of a doctor. Most breast problems are not breast cancer and most lumps are not cancerous. When a lump is not cancerous it is referred to as 'benign'. A cancerous lump is called 'malignant'. But only a professional clinician can make that diagnosis and it's no use waiting, worrying and hoping it will go away. Sometimes small lumps, in the early stages, are hard to find, but the earlier a lump is diagnosed, the better, so catch lumps small, don't wait until they're large.

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Taking care of ourselves, including regular breast examinations, is an ongoing commitment that requires self-discipline and knowledge. It is well worth the effort as early diagnosis is definitely the most important factor in surviving breast cancer.

An extra tool in the early detection of breast lumps is a small plastic pad to be used as an aid in breast self-exams (BSE). This is now fully registered as a medical device and approved for sale throughout the free world.

<http://www.healthy-info.co.uk/breast-examination.htm>

To order a single unit (UK only) send £25 plus £1 P&P

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