



What is Breast Cancer?

(Thanks to CDC for making this information available online at www.cdc.gov.)

Cancer is a disease in which abnormal cells in the body grow out of control. Cancers are named after the part of the body where the abnormal cell growth begins. Breast cancers are cancer cells from the breast. When breast cancer cells spread to other parts of the body, they are called metastases.

Common Kinds of Breast Cancer

There are different kinds of breast cancer. The kind of breast cancer depends on which cells in the breast turn into cancer. Breast cancer can begin in different parts of the breast, like the ducts or the lobes. Common kinds of breast cancer are:

Ductal carcinoma. The most common kind of breast cancer. It begins in the cells that line the milk ducts in the breast, also called the lining of the breast ducts.

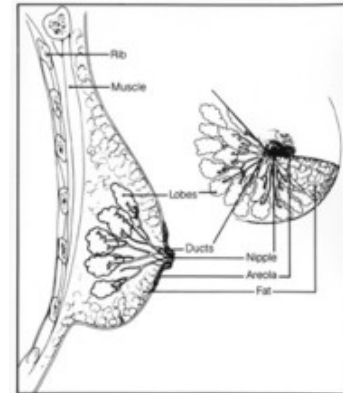
Ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS). The abnormal cancer cells are only in the lining of the milk ducts, and have not spread to other tissues in the breast.

Invasive ductal carcinoma. The abnormal cancer cells break through the ducts and spread into other parts of the breast tissue. Invasive cancer cells can also spread to other parts of the body.

Lobular carcinoma. In this kind of breast cancer, the cancer cells begin in the lobes, or lobules, of the breast. Lobules are the glands that make milk.

Lobular carcinoma in situ (LCIS). The cancer cells are found only in the breast lobules. Lobular carcinoma in situ, or LCIS, does not spread to other tissues very often.

Invasive lobular carcinoma. Cancer cells spread from the lobules to the breast tissues that are close by. These invasive cancer cells can also spread to other parts of the body.



Uncommon Kinds of Breast Cancer

There are several other less common kinds of breast cancer, such as Paget's disease or inflammatory breast cancer. For more information about these kinds of breast cancer, visit the National Cancer Institute's at <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/pdq/treatment/breast/Patient/page1>.

Risk Factors

Research has found several risk factors that may increase your chances of getting breast cancer. Risk factors that increase risk of breast cancer include:

- Getting older.
- Being younger when you first had your menstrual period.
- Starting menopause at a later age.
- Being older at the birth of your first child.
- Never giving birth
- Not breastfeeding.
- Personal history of breast cancer or some non-cancerous breast diseases.
- Family history of breast cancer (mother, sister, daughter).
- Treatment with radiation therapy to the breast/chest.
- Being overweight (increases risk for breast cancer after menopause).
- Long-term use of hormone replacement therapy (estrogen and progesterone combined).
- Having changes in the breast cancer-related genes BRCA1 or BRCA2.
- Using birth control pills, also called oral contraceptives.
- Drinking alcohol (more than one drink a day).
- Not getting regular exercise.

Having a risk factor does not mean you will get the disease. Most women have some risk factors and most women do not get breast cancer. If you have breast cancer risk factors, talk with your doctor about ways you can lower your risk and about screening for breast cancer.

Reducing Risk

There are ways you can help lower your risk of breast cancer:

Control your weight and exercise. Make healthy choices in the foods you eat and the kinds of drinks you have each day. Stay active. To learn more about keeping a healthy weight and ways to increase your physical activity, visit CDC's Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity and MyPyramid.gov.

Know your family history of breast cancer. If you have a mother, sister, or daughter with breast cancer, ask your doctor what is your risk of getting breast cancer and how you can lower your risk. For more information, visit the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality for information about medicines to prevent breast cancer and about genetic testing for breast cancer.

Find out the risks and benefits of hormone replacement therapy. Some women use hormone replacement therapy (HRT) to treat the symptoms of menopause. Ask your doctor about the risks and benefits of HRT and find out if hormone replacement therapy is right for you. To learn more about HRT, visit the Agency for Healthcare Research Quality and the National Cancer Institute (NCI)—Menopausal Hormone Use and Cancer: Questions and Answers.

Limit the amount of alcohol you drink. For more information, see the Alcohol Chapter of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005.

Get screened for breast cancer regularly. By getting the necessary exams, you can increase your chances of finding out early on, if you have breast cancer. Ask your doctor what test you should be screened for and at what age.

Kinds of Screening Tests

Breast cancer screening means checking a woman's breasts for cancer before there are signs or symptoms of the disease. Three main tests are used to screen the breasts for cancer. Talk to your doctor about which tests are right for you, and when you should have them.

Mammogram. A mammogram is an X-ray of the breast. Mammograms are the best method to detect breast cancer early when it is easier to treat and before it is big enough to feel or cause symptoms. Having regular mammograms can lower the risk of dying from breast cancer. If you are age 40 years or older, be sure to have a screening mammogram every one to two years.

Clinical breast exam. A clinical breast exam is an examination by a doctor or nurse, who uses his or her hands to feel for lumps or other changes.

Breast self-exam. A breast self-exam is when you check your own breasts for lumps, changes in size or shape of the breast, or any other changes in the breasts or underarm (armpit).

Which tests to choose: Having a clinical breast exam or a breast self-exam have not been found to decrease risk of dying from breast cancer. Keep in mind that, at this time, the best way to find breast cancer is with a mammogram. If you choose to have clinical breast exams and to perform breast self-exams, be sure you also get regular mammograms.

Staging

If breast cancer is diagnosed, tests are done to find out if cancer cells have spread within the breast or to other parts of the body. This process is called staging. Whether the cancer is only in the breast, is found in lymph nodes under your arm, or has spread outside the breast determines your stage of breast cancer. The type and stage of breast cancer tells doctors what kind of treatment will be needed.

Treatment

It is common for doctors from different specialties to work together in treating breast cancer. Surgeons are doctors that perform operations. Medical oncologists are doctors that treat cancers with medicines. Radiation oncologists are doctors that treat cancers with radiation.

More Information

For more information, visit the National Cancer Institute (NCI) – Breast Cancer Treatment Option Overview at www.cancer.org. This site can also help you find a doctor or treatment facility that works in cancer care.

*(This flyer is excerpted from information found at www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/basic_info .)
(Go to the CDC website to read the complete presentation on breast cancer.)*