



Your Breast Health: What is Breast Cancer?

What is breast cancer?

Breast cancer is cancer that begins in the breast tissue. There are many types of breast cancer. It is possible for breast cancer to spread to other areas of the body.

What causes breast cancer?

No one is sure what causes breast cancer, although there are certain factors that can increase a woman's risk for breast cancer. These include genetics, lifestyle choices (such as diet and alcohol use), and reproductive factors (such as age of first period and menopause).

Who gets breast cancer?

Both women and men can get breast cancer, although it is more common in women. Breast cancer is most common among women over 50, although it is possible for women younger than 40 to get breast cancer. The risk of breast cancer increases with age.

How do you treat breast cancer?

There are many different treatments for breast cancer and they vary depending on the type of cancer. Surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, and certain medications are all possible breast cancer treatments. A woman's treatment program will be determined by her health care provider.

How can I prevent breast cancer?

Studies have shown that certain behaviors can help reduce a person's risk for developing breast cancer. These behaviors include:

- Limiting alcohol consumption
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Exercising regularly
- Avoiding long-term use of certain hormones, if possible

While these methods are not guaranteed, they have been shown to reduce the risk for breast cancer.

What is early detection?

Early detection refers to screening (also known as tests or exams) to find breast cancer early, before it has progressed into another stage, or spreads to another part of the body.

The American Cancer Society recommends that women in their 20s and 30s have a clinical breast exam (typically done by hand) during their regular health exams every three years. Women in their 20s should perform monthly breast self exams (BSE). This will enable young women to become familiar with their breasts and help them determine if anything has changed or become uncharacteristic. Women 40 and older should have a clinical breast exam done by a health care professional every year, as well as a yearly mammogram (an X-ray of the breast). Women who have a higher risk for breast cancer, such as a family history, should talk to their health care provider about more thorough screening procedures.

