



WOMEN'S HEALTH: BREAST CANCER

CAUSES & RISK FACTORS

Medical experts attribute the development of breast cancer to a combination of both unknown and known factors including genetics, lifestyle choices and reproductive factors, which may include:

- Older age
- Menstruation at an early age
- Family history
- Having dense breast tissue
- Never having given birth, or having first given birth at an older age
- Having radiation therapy to the breast/chest
- Drinking alcoholic beverages
- Taking hormones

PROGNOSIS & TREATMENT

The chance of recovery and the treatment options depend on many factors, including the stage of cancer, how fast the tumor is growing, hormone receptor levels, and a woman's age and general health. There are four standard types of treatment used for breast cancer:

1. Surgery, ranging from a small lump of tissue being removed to an entire breast (mastectomy)
2. Radiation therapy, which uses high-energy X-rays to kill cancer cells or to prevent their growth
3. Chemotherapy, which uses drugs to stop the growth of cancer cells
4. Hormone therapy, which removes hormones or blocks their action to keep cancer cells from growing

SYMPTOMS & SCREENINGS

The most common indication of breast cancer is discovering a lump in the breast or underarm area. Other signs include swelling, skin irritation/dimpling, nipple pain/abnormalities, redness or scaly skin and discharge from the nipple.

To detect breast cancer, physicians may use the following tests and procedures:

- Mammogram – a breast X-ray
- Biopsy – the removal of cells or tissues so they can be viewed under a microscope
- Estrogen and progesterone receptor tests – to determine the levels of each hormone
- MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) – a procedure that uses a magnet, radio waves and a computer to make a series of detailed pictures of inside the body

DID YOU KNOW?

The best way to find breast cancer early is by performing a breast self-exam each month. Start by looking at your breasts in the mirror to see if they look physically different. Next, lie down and use a few fingers in a circular motion to go over each breast. Finally, do the same motion while standing.