

Breast Cancer Fact Sheet

Statistics show that, as the most common form of cancer in women, one in 29 women in South Africa will be diagnosed with breast cancer. The good news is that if it's detected early, there is an excellent chance of recovery.

What is breast cancer?

Cancer is a disease in which cells in the body grow out of control. When cancer starts in the breast, it is called breast cancer. The breast is made up of three main parts: glands, ducts, and connective tissue.

Sometimes breast cells become abnormal and grow faster than normal cells. These extra cells form a mass called a tumour. Some tumours are benign, or not cancerous, while others are malignant, meaning they are cancerous and have the ability to spread to other parts of the breast and body and disrupt normal functions in those areas.

Breast cancer is more common in older women and the majority of women are over 50 years old when they are diagnosed.

What are the symptoms of breast cancer?

- Difference in breast sizes
- Lumps
- Unusual swellings
- Puckering of the skin
- Sores
- Pain
- Discharge

What are the risk factors for breast cancer?

Older women are at a higher risk of getting breast cancer than younger women. In addition to age, the following factors could also put a woman at a higher risk of getting breast cancer:

- Being overweight
- Drinking alcohol
- Not exercising
- Not having any children and not breast feeding
- Prolonged hormone replacement therapy or combined oral contraceptive
- Starting your first menstrual period at an early age
- Beginning menopause at a late age
- Having a personal history of breast cancer or certain benign breast diseases, such as atypical ductal hyperplasia
- Having close family relatives (such as a mother, sister, father, or daughter) who have had breast cancer
- Having a genetic condition, such as certain mutations in your BRCA1 or BRCA2 genes (the two genes in which mutations are associated with hereditary breast and ovarian cancer)
- Having been treated with radiation therapy to the breast or chest

Can men get breast cancer?

About 1% of all breast cancer occurs in men. It is often first noticed as a lump in one breast that is not painful. A man who is older and has a strong family history of female or male breast cancer or ovarian cancer may be at a higher risk of developing breast cancer.

Is there a test that can find breast cancer early?

Mammograms are the best tests for finding breast cancer early. Mammograms are a series of X-ray pictures of the breast that allow doctors to look for early signs of breast cancer, sometimes up to three years before it can be felt. When breast cancer is found early, treatment is most effective and many women go on to live long and healthy lives.

What happens if the mammogram is abnormal?

If your mammogram is abnormal or more tests are required, do not panic. Many women need additional tests, and most are not diagnosed with cancer. An abnormal mammogram does not always mean you have cancer. It does mean that you will need to have some additional X-rays or other tests before your doctor can be sure. Other tests may include an ultrasound (picture taken of the breast using sound waves) or a biopsy (removing tissue samples to be looked at closely under a microscope). You may be referred to a breast specialist or a surgeon.

Reference:

www.cansa.org.za

www.cdc.gov

www.capegateway.gov.za

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