

# BREAST CANCER SCREENING AND PREVENTION

F. Netter M.D.



Early detection and treatment of breast cancer increases chances of successful recovery.

The cancer might be detected as a lump that you can feel under the skin of your chest or armpits.



As cancer grows, it can change how your breast looks.



Dimpling of skin



Nipple inversion



Orange peel appearance



Enlargement and dilation of blood vessels

## What Is Breast Cancer?

Breast cancer is abnormal growth of cells in the breast (ducts, lobules, or other tissues). It is the most common cancer in women in the United States. It is the second most common cause of cancer-related death in women, and the main cause of death in women aged 45 to 55. Each year, about 200,000 American women are diagnosed with breast cancer, and more than 40,000 die of this disease. Breast cancer occurs 100 times more often in women than in men.

Even though the number of new cases of breast cancer is rising, the death rate dropped about 20% in the past 20 years. This drop is partly because increased screening catches the disease earlier, so chances of recovery are higher.

Women with a strong family history of breast or ovarian cancer should talk with the doctor about whether blood testing for familial breast cancer is a good idea, to check for genes called BRCA1 and BRCA2.

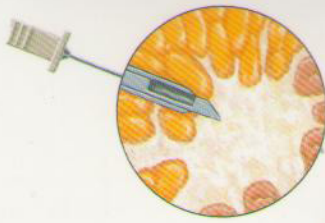
A higher risk of breast cancer may be related to, among other factors, having previous breast cancer, age (especially older than 50), first menstrual period at a young age (12 or younger), menopause (when periods stopped) after age 55, and taking high-dose estrogen after menopause.

## What Are the Symptoms of Breast Cancer?

Early breast cancer usually does not cause pain and may cause no symptoms. About 10% of people have no pain or lumps or any other sign of a problem with the breasts.

A growing breast tumor, however, can cause changes that both women and men should watch for:

- A lump or thickening (mass, swelling, skin irritation, or distortion) in or near the breast or under the arms
- A change in breast size or shape
- A change in color or feel of the skin of the breast, areola, or nipple (dimpled, puckered, or scaly)
- Nipple discharge, erosion, inversion, or tenderness



A breast (needle) biopsy may be needed for an accurate diagnosis.

An abnormal mammogram can be the first sign of possible breast cancer. Women over 40 years old should have mammogram screenings every 1 to 2 years.



A monthly breast self-exam is critical for detecting breast cancer before it spreads. Use the pads of the fingers to check the breast, in increasing or decreasing circles, firmly, carefully, and thoroughly. Feel for any unusual lump or mass under the skin. Check your breasts in both standing and lying down positions.



## How Is Breast Cancer Diagnosed?

In many cases, a woman or her doctor feels a lump or discovers a change in the breast.

The doctor often suspects breast cancer because of an abnormal mammogram (a low-dose x-ray of breasts). Some women at high risk of developing breast cancer now have magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to screen for it, in addition to mammograms.

A lump should not be ignored, even if mammogram results are normal. A mammogram doesn't show up to 20% of new breast cancers.

If cancer is suspected, the next step is to confirm the diagnosis by taking a biopsy, or removing a small piece of the abnormal area, for study. The biopsy may be done in the office.

## DOs and DON'Ts in Diagnosing and Preventing Breast Cancer:

- ✓ **DO** have a regular screening mammogram, every 1 to 2 years if older than 40.
- ✓ **DO** a careful breast self-exam (BSE) monthly.
- ✓ **DO** get to know how your breasts normally feel so that you can better notice any change.
- ✓ **DO** call your doctor if you notice lumps or skin changes in your breasts.
- ✓ **DO** take medicine, if suggested by your doctor.
- ⊗ **DON'T** smoke.
- ⊗ **DON'T** drink alcohol in excess.

### FROM THE DESK OF

### NOTES

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

#### Contact the following sources:

American Cancer Society

Web: [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

National Comprehensive Cancer Network

Web: [www.nccn.org](http://www.nccn.org)

Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation

Web: [www.komen.org](http://www.komen.org)