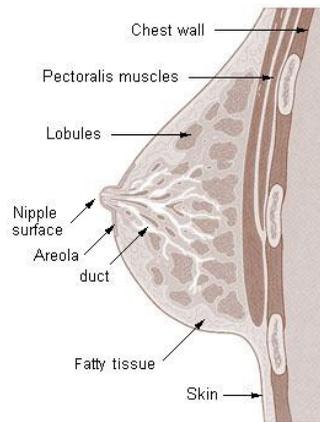


BREAST CANCER is one of the most commonly diagnosed cancers in Caribbean women and one of the leading causes of death from cancer in the Caribbean. The good news is that more women are surviving a breast cancer diagnosis. Read on to learn more about breast cancer.

What is breast cancer?

Our body consists of cells. Normal cells grow, multiply and die in an orderly manner and are replaced by new cells. Cancer cells do not die but continue to multiply in a disorderly manner. Over time they can form a mass which may be malignant, in other words cancerous. Breast cancer develops when this process occurs in the cells of the breast tissue.



What increases my risk?

A **RISK FACTOR** increases the likelihood that you will develop a disease. Having a risk factor does not mean that you *will* develop a disease. Different cancers have different risk factors. Risk factors for breast cancer include:

Gender – Women are 100 times more likely than a man is to develop breast cancer.

Age – The older you are the greater your risk. Most cases occur in women over the age of 50.

Family Medical History – Having one or more close family relatives – your mother or father, sister or brother, daughter or son – diagnosed with breast cancer will increase your risk of developing breast cancer. Additionally a family history of colorectal and ovarian cancer can also increase your risk.

In some cases, a defective gene can be passed on which will increase the risk. There are several associated with breast cancer including BRCA1, BRCA2, ATM and CHEK2 genes.

Personal Medical History - If you have been previously diagnosed with breast cancer, you are at risk for a new breast cancer diagnosis. A personal history of ovarian and colon cancer will increase the risk of breast cancer.

Some non-cancerous breast disorders can potentially increase your risk for developing breast cancer.

Additionally, women who have received radiation exposure to the chest area in the past e.g. because of a previous cancer

diagnosis may be at greater risk for developing breast cancer.

Breast Density – Women with dense breasts are at increased risk for breast cancer because there are more cells that can potentially become damaged and secondly it can be more challenging to identify abnormal tissue during a screening test.

Estrogen Exposure – Estrogen is an essential female hormone. The more estrogen your body is exposed to over your lifetime the greater your risk for breast cancer.

Women who can answer YES to any of the statements below may be at increased risk:

- I started having my monthly period before the age of 12.
- I went through menopause after the age of 55.
- I had my first child after the age of 30.
- I have never been pregnant.
- I have used hormone replacement therapy for more than five years.

Oral Contraceptive – Long-term use of “the pill” can increase a woman’s risk of developing breast cancer.

Alcohol – The more alcohol you drink, the greater your risk of developing breast cancer regardless of the type of alcohol you drink.

Obesity & Weight Gain – Obesity or significant weight gain in adult life, especially after menopause will increase a woman’s risk for breast cancer.

Other Factors – There is no scientific evidence to prove that any of the following increase your risk of developing breast cancer:

- The use of antiperspirants
- Wearing an underwire bra
- Having a miscarriage or abortion
- Having breast implants
- Receiving a bump or bruise to the breast.

What decreases my risk?

Any factor that lowers your risk of developing a disease is a **PROTECTIVE FACTOR**. These factors do not guarantee that a disease will not develop. Different cancers have different protective factors. Protective factors for breast cancer prevention include:

Exercise – Regular exercise for a minimum of 4 hours a week may reduce your risk of breast cancer.

Diet – There is evidence to suggest that a low fat diet that includes 5 – 10 servings of fruits and vegetables per day may lower the risk of developing breast cancer.

Alcohol – Avoid drinking alcoholic beverages.

Pregnancy – A woman who has had children has a lower risk of developing breast cancer.

Breastfeeding – Women who breastfeed their children have a lower risk of developing breast cancer than women who do not breastfeed.

Screening

Screening tests are done on persons who have no signs or symptoms of a disease. Following the screening recommendations for breast cancer can reduce your risk of developing breast. In the Cayman Islands it is recommended that a woman of average risk has her first mammogram at age 40, and then every two years after that, or as recommended by her doctor. More information on a mammogram, and how to prepare for one, is available in our brochure “Mammograms – What You Need to Know.” Additionally, the Cancer Society recommends that all women over the age of 18 perform a monthly breast self-exam and have a clinical breast exam performed by a medical practitioner on a yearly basis.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Early breast cancer often has no signs or symptoms. For this reason, all women are urged to become familiar with what their breasts look like and feel like.

Changes in your breast that you might FEEL or SEE when doing a breast self-exam are:

- *Lumps* – A new lump, thickening or bumpy area in a breast or armpit. It is important to remember that most lumps are NOT breast cancer but you should consult with your doctor if you find one.
- *Appearance* – A change in the size, shape or colour of your breast as well

as the appearance of dimpling of the skin, a rash or sores that do not heal.

- *Nipple change* – A discharge from the nipple that is not associated with breastfeeding. Additionally observe if there has been a change of nipple position, e.g. it may be pointing inward.

Mammograms in the Cayman Islands

If you cannot afford a mammogram, you can contact the Lions Club of Tropical Gardens or the Cayman Islands Cancer Society who will provide you with a voucher for a free mammogram. Mammograms can be done at the Cayman Islands Hospital, Chrissie Tomlinson Memorial Hospital or Medlab.

Remember:

KNOW what is **NORMAL** for your breasts.

LOOK AT and **FEEL** your breasts once a month.

KNOW what **CHANGES** to look for.

REPORT any changes immediately to your doctor.

About the Cayman Islands Cancer Society

The Cayman Islands Cancer Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to preventing the development of cancer through its education programs and screening initiatives as well as to providing financial assistance to cancer patients and their families with treatment related expenses. The Society also offers counseling and support to cancer patients and their families. The Society funds its programs through donations and fundraising events.

Contact us

For more information on our programs and the Society, we invite you to visit our office in between the hours of 9am and 4pm, Monday – Friday.

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