



BREAST CANCER

THE BREASTS

Inside a woman's breast are 15 to 20 sections called lobes. Each lobe is made of many smaller sections called lobules. Lobules have groups of tiny glands that can make milk. After a baby is born, a woman's breast milk flows from the lobules through thin tubes called ducts to the nipple. Fat and fibrous tissue fill the spaces between the lobules and ducts. The breasts also contain lymph vessels. These vessels are connected to small, round masses of tissue called lymph nodes. Groups of lymph nodes are near the breast in the underarm (axilla), above the collarbone, and in the chest behind the breastbone.

However long the night, the dawn will break.

- Hausa (African) proverb.

RISK FACTORS

Studies have found the following risk factors for breast cancer:

- **Age:** The chance of getting breast cancer increases as you get older. Most women are over 60 years old when they are diagnosed.
- **Personal health history:** Having breast cancer in one breast increases your risk of getting cancer in your other breast. Also, having certain types of abnormal breast cells (atypical hyperplasia, lobular carcinoma in situ [LCIS], or ductal carcinoma in situ [DCIS]) increases the risk of invasive breast cancer. These conditions are found with a breast biopsy.
- **Family health history:** Your risk of breast cancer is higher if your mother, father, sister, or daughter had breast cancer. The risk is even higher if your family member had breast cancer before age 50. Having other relatives (in either your mother's or father's family) with breast cancer or ovarian cancer may also increase your risk.
- **Certain genome changes:** Changes in certain genes, such as BRCA1 or BRCA2, substantially increase the risk of breast cancer. Tests can sometimes show the presence of these rare, specific gene changes in families with many women who have had breast cancer, and health care providers may suggest ways to try to reduce the risk of breast cancer or to improve the detection of this disease in women who have these genetic changes. Also, researchers have found specific regions on certain chromosomes that are linked to the risk of breast cancer.
- **Radiation therapy to the chest:** Women who had radiation therapy to the chest (including the breasts) before age 30 are at an increased risk of breast cancer. This includes women treated with radiation for Hodgkin lymphoma. Studies show that the younger a woman was when she received radiation treatment, the higher her risk of breast cancer later in life.
- **Reproductive and menstrual history:**
 - The older a woman is when she has her first child, the greater her chance of breast cancer.
 - Women who never had children are at an increased risk of breast cancer.
 - Women who had their first menstrual period before age 12 are at an increased risk of breast cancer.
 - Women who went through menopause after age 55 are at an increased risk of breast cancer.
 - Women who take menopausal hormone therapy for many years have an increased risk of breast cancer.
- **Race:** In the United States, breast cancer is diagnosed more often in white women than in African American/black, Hispanic/Latina, Asian/Pacific Islander, or American Indian/Alaska Native women.





- **Breast density:** Breasts appear on a mammogram (breast x-ray) as having areas of dense and fatty (not dense) tissue. Women whose mammograms show a larger area of dense tissue than the mammograms of women of the same age are at increased risk of breast cancer.
- **Being overweight or obese after menopause:** The chance of getting breast cancer after menopause is higher in women who are overweight or obese.
- **Lack of physical activity:** Women who are physically inactive throughout life may have an increased risk of breast cancer.
- **Drinking alcohol:** Studies suggest that the more alcohol a woman drinks, the greater her risk of breast cancer.

Having a risk factor does not mean that a woman will get breast cancer. Most women who have risk factors never develop breast cancer.

SYMPTOMS

Early breast cancer usually doesn't cause symptoms. But as the tumor grows, it can change how the breast looks or feels. The common changes include:

1. A lump or thickening in or near the breast or in the underarm area
2. A change in the size or shape of the breast
3. Dimpling or puckering in the skin of the breast
4. A nipple turned inward into the breast
5. Discharge (fluid) from the nipple, especially if it's bloody
6. Scaly, red, or swollen skin on the breast, nipple, or areola (the dark area of skin at the center of the breast). The skin may have ridges or pitting so that it looks like the skin of an orange.

You should see your health care provider about any symptom that does not go away. Most often, these symptoms are not due to cancer. Another health problem could cause them. If you have any of these symptoms, you should tell your health care provider so that the problems can be diagnosed and treated.

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