

Just the Facts... Breast Cancer

Breast cancer occurs when cells in the breast grow and multiply uncontrollably, damaging surrounding tissue and interfering with the normal function of the breast. The cells can spread to other parts of the body. When the disease spreads, it is still called breast cancer.

Your best chance for surviving breast cancer is detecting it early. When found early, there is a 96 percent chance for cure.

Symptoms

Symptoms of breast cancer may vary from woman to woman. Women should be familiar with their breasts so that they know what feels and looks normal for them. Changes should be promptly reported to a health care provider. Many cancers are found by regular mammography after age 40 – before any symptoms are felt.

Symptoms include

- lump or mass in your breast
- enlarged lymph nodes in the armpit
- changes in breast size, shape, skin texture or color
- skin redness
- dimpling or puckering
- nipple changes or discharge
- scaliness
- nipple pulling to one side or a change in direction

Having any of these symptoms does not mean you have cancer, but if you notice one or more of them for more than two weeks, see your doctor.



Swimming has been Laurine Schuler's favorite activity since childhood, so naturally she got back in the pool after surgery for breast cancer more than a decade ago. Since then, she set records in Senior Olympic and Masters' swim competitions.

Risk Factors

Many factors may influence the development of breast cancer, including:

- **age** Most cases occur in women 50 or older; it is less common in women 35 or younger. Age is the most influential risk factor.
- **family history** Your risk is higher with a family history (especially mother, sister, daughter) of breast and/or ovarian cancer.
- **hormones / childbirth** Your risk is higher if you had your first period before age 12, began menopause after age 55, never had children or had your first child after age 30. Postmenopausal use of hormonal therapy increases your risk of developing breast cancer.
- **previous biopsy** If you've had abnormal breast biopsy results or benign breast diseases requiring biopsies, you may be at increased risk. Other breast diseases such as atypical hyperplasia, lobular or ductal carcinoma in situ are risk factors, too.
- **education / socioeconomic status** Women with a higher socioeconomic status and/or education tend to have fewer children and start childbearing after age 30 – both of which put them at higher risk.
- **weight** Obesity or weight gain after menopause are risk factors.
- **genetic alterations** Inherited alterations in the genes, called BRCA1 and BRCA2, account for about five to 10 percent of all breast cancer cases.

Other risk factors include:

- oral contraceptive use
- a diet high in saturated fats
- physical inactivity
- alcohol (more than one alcoholic drink a day)

The Best of Breast Health

Screening

Cancer screening exams are medical tests that are performed when a person has no symptoms. All women should be familiar with their breasts so that they will notice any changes and report them to their doctor without delay. M. D. Anderson also recommends the following:

- Clinical breast exams every one to three years beginning at age 20.
- Yearly mammograms and clinical breast exams beginning at age 40 and continuing for as long as a woman is in good health.

M. D. Anderson breast cancer experts recommend that all women practice “breast self-awareness” (BSA) as part of the triad of breast cancer screening guidelines, which includes breast exams by physicians (clinical breast exams) and mammograms.

Tips

- Schedule a clinical breast exam at the time of or just before your regularly scheduled mammogram.
- If you are age 35 or older, ask your doctor to calculate your breast cancer risk.
- Consider additional screening if you are at risk. Women at increased risk of breast cancer (e.g., family history, genetic predisposition, past breast cancer) should talk to their doctor about the benefits and limitations of starting mammograms earlier, having additional test (e.g., breast ultrasound or MRI) or having more frequent exams.

These recommendations are provided as a guide. If exam results suggest cancer, more extensive diagnostic tests, such as an ultrasound or biopsy of the breast tissue, should be conducted.

Reducing Your Risk

You can take action to reduce your risk of developing breast cancer. M. D. Anderson suggests:

- talking to your doctor about your use of oral contraceptives and hormonal therapy
- maintaining your ideal weight
- eating at least five servings of fruits and vegetables per day
- following recommended screening guidelines
- exercising regularly
- eliminating tobacco use and using alcohol in moderation
- getting your breast cancer risk assessed
- if you're at increased risk, talk to your doctor about medications that can reduce your risk of developing breast cancer.

Take time to discuss your own risks with your health care provider who can best advise you on the screening exams and risk-reduction strategies that are right for you.

Want to learn how you can prevent cancer?

Get a personalized action plan by completing M. D. Anderson's Risk Check at www.mdanderson.org/prevention.

Produced by the Public Education Office, 713-792-3363
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www.mdanderson.org/publiceducation
February 2009

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Making Cancer History®



Barbara Roberts detected a lump in her breast more than five years ago. She enjoys spending time with her daughter, gardening, bike riding, reading and listening to music. She's a good cook, too.

M. D. Anderson Resources:

M. D. Anderson's Cancer Prevention Center offers thorough cancer screening examinations that include cancer risk assessment, screening exams based on age and gender, as well as personalized risk-reduction strategies. Prevention programs include genetic testing, chemoprevention and nutritional counseling. For more information or to schedule an appointment, call 713-745-8040 or 1-800-438-6434.

Other M. D. Anderson resources are available to the public, including patient support services, educational programs, guided tours, a learning center and wellness programs. You don't have to be an M. D. Anderson patient to use many of these services.

For more information about M. D. Anderson programs, services or referral, contact *askMDAnderson* at 1-877-MDA-6789 or www.mdanderson.org/ask.

