



Breast
CANCER
A W A R E N E S S

Breast Cancer Basics

Breast cancer is one of the most prevalent cancers that affects people today. Numerous researchers, doctors and organizations are working tirelessly to find a cure.

But what do you really know about it? Here is an outline for how breast cancer occurs, signs and symptoms and who is at risk for developing the illness.

WHAT IT IS

Cancer is a group of diseases that cause cells in the body to change dramatically and grow exponentially. These abnormal growths are called tumors, which have the ability to grow into other tissues and even travel to other parts of the body.

Most breast cancers are invasive or infiltrating — which means they have broken through the walls of the ducts or glands where they originated and grow into the breast tissue.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Breast cancer typically

shows no symptoms in the early stages, when the tumor is small (and can be easily treated). This is why it is important for women to perform self-breast examinations on a monthly basis and go for recommended screenings.

When the cancer has grown to a size that can be felt, the most common sign is a pain-

less lump.

While there can be other physical changes to the breast — including swelling, thickening or redness of the breast tissue, puckering of the nipple or a spontaneous or bloody discharge — it is important to note that pain (or lack of pain) does not indicate the presence or

absence of breast cancer.

WHO GETS BREAST CANCER

The short answer: everyone. However, it is more prevalent in women, and accounts for 29 percent of all newly diagnosed cancers among U.S. women, according to the American Cancer

Society.

Risk increases with age. The appearance of breast cancer is higher among white women than black women between the ages of 60 and 84. However, black women have a higher occurrence rate before the age of 45, and are more likely to die from breast cancer at every age.



Pink Ribbon History

The pink ribbon has become a well-known symbol for breast cancer awareness and support. But how did ribbons become silent declarations of support? Why pink? Here's the scoop.

RIBBONS AS SYMBOLS

Ribbons first became a tool to bring awareness and support to a cause in 1979 — when the wife of one of the prisoners of the Iran hostage crisis, Penny Laingen, decided to use a yellow ribbon to show support for her husband and the other hostages.

A decade later, Visual AIDS — an AIDS awareness and support group — employed a red ribbon on a national stage during the Tony Awards. Since then, many organizations have claimed their own unique ribbon color to signify support and awareness for their cause.

A PEACHY PAST

The ribbon for breast cancer awareness got its start as peach colored, according to Pink Ribbon International — an initiative for breast cancer awareness and funding.

Charlotte Hayley, a breast cancer patient, introduced the peach ribbon by attaching it to cards saying, “The National Cancer Institute’s annual budget is 1.8 billion U.S. dollars, and only 5 percent goes to cancer prevention. Help us wake up our legislators and America by wearing this ribbon.”

Haley distributed thousands of these cards, and her message spread by word of mouth, but her efforts were strictly grassroots.

THE MAKING OF AN ICON

The pink ribbon truly became established in 1991, after the cosmetics industry endorsed the symbol. This is also how the ribbon took on the pink hue it is known for today. The editor-in-chief of Self Magazine, who was working on a breast cancer awareness issue with Estee Lauder Cosmetics, sought to incorporate Haley’s ribbon, but Haley rejected the collaboration — stating that the magazine’s intent was “too commercial.”

Unable to use the original peach ribbon for legal reasons, the magazine changed the color to pink — and the rest is history.



Reduce Your Risk

While some risk factors for breast cancer come from family history and reproductive influences that are out of our control, there are many risk factors that come from our lifestyle that can be personally monitored or controlled.

Altering, eliminating or limiting each of the following habits could keep your risk of developing breast cancer significantly lower.

SMOKING **Eliminate**

If you needed yet one more reason to quit smoking, here it is. Long-term research shows that those who smoked at least 10 cigarettes per day for 20 years or more were 30 percent more likely to develop invasive breast cancer.

Girls who started smoking before age 15 were nearly 50 percent more likely to develop invasive breast cancer. These numbers are scary. Quitting might be difficult, but considering what is at stake, there should be plenty of motivation to kick the habit.

ALCOHOL **Limit**

According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, women who consume anywhere from two to five drinks per day are 40 percent more likely to develop breast cancer over non-drinkers.

The occasional drink is not a

problem, according to some research, and is actually shown to lessen your risk for other illnesses and conditions.

On the flip side, the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) and the World Cancer Research Fund published a report in 2017 stating that even one alcoholic drink per day can increase the risk of breast cancer by 5 percent for pre-menopausal women and 9 percent for post-menopausal women.

DIET AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY **Alter**

Another important risk factor for breast cancer is weight. As body mass index increases, so does a woman's risk of developing breast cancer — especially if the additional weight is carried in her midsection.

This is because abdominal weight is exceptionally “metabolically active,” producing hormones and other growth factors.

Given that vigorous exercise and losing weight also can lower the risk of several other diseases, including heart disease and diabetes, it is a factor worth taking serious note of when trying to improve your overall health and wellness.



The Self-Breast Exam

Because breast cancer is the most common cancer for women today, routine self-examination is an essential step in catching the disease early.

In fact, according to the National Breast Cancer Association, 40 percent of diagnosed breast cancers are detected by women through self-examination.

By examining yourself on a monthly basis, you will quickly become familiar with your breasts and the surrounding tissue and will easily be able to see or feel an abnormality, such as an unusual lump, changes in the skin or any sort of discharge.

HOW TO LOOK

While physically looking down at your breasts is a good start, it is not adequate for a full examination. To view each section of your breasts equally, you must stand in front of a mirror.

Check for dents, pulls and any sort of odd coloring. Be sure to check your breasts standing straight ahead with your arms resting at your sides, again straight ahead with your arms raised above your head, and again leaning slightly forward with your hands on your hips.

HOW TO FEEL

Just as you do with a visual examination, to properly feel your breasts for abnormalities, you must examine them in several positions.

The shower is an excellent location for an exam, because the water helps your fingers glide over the tissue easily. Use the middle part of your first three fingers (rather than the fingertips) to gently move the breast.

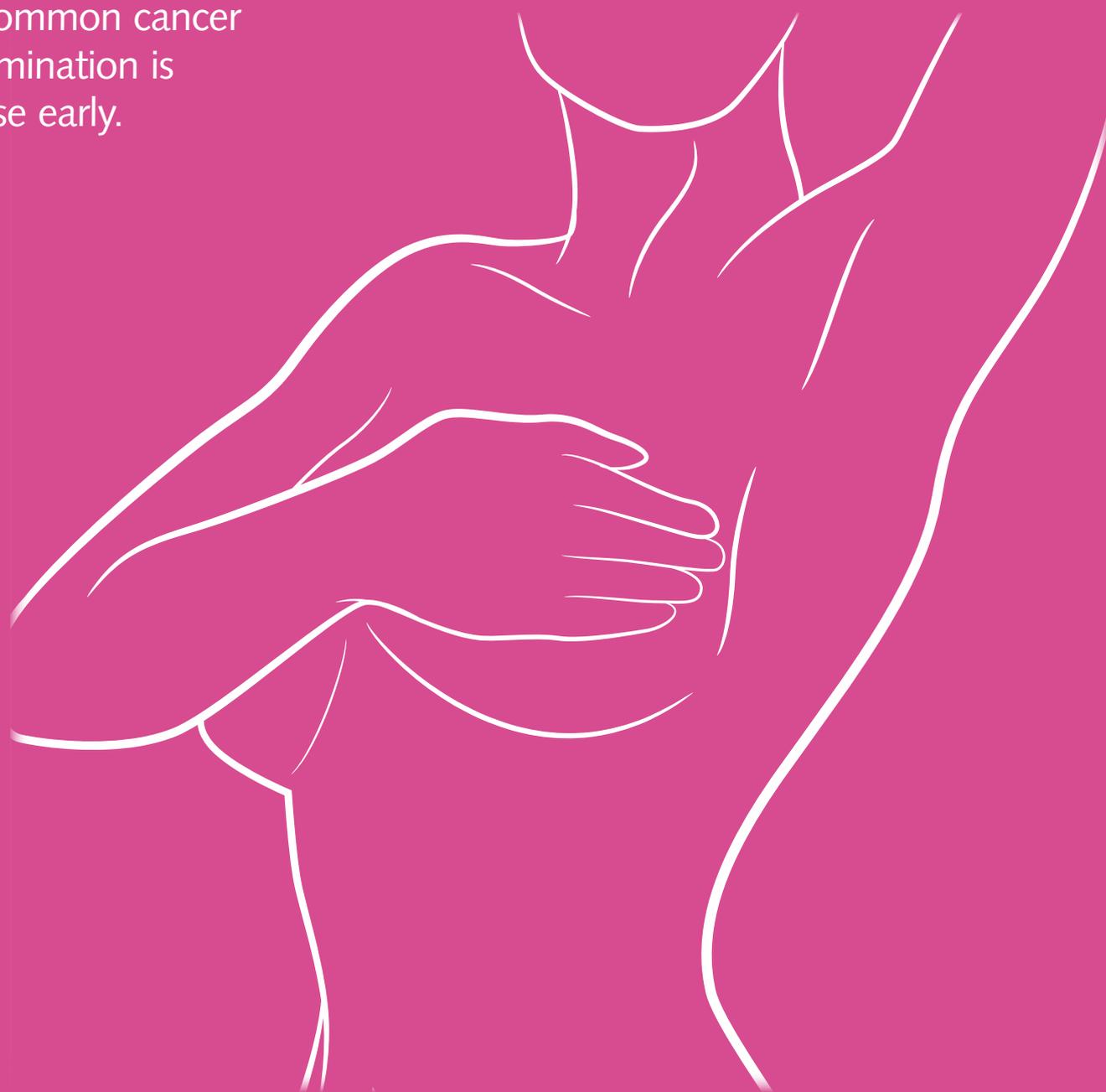
Move your hand from the outside of the breast towards the nipple and then back out to the edge. Do not ignore the fleshy part of your armpit, as this is also technically breast tissue and should not be overlooked.

The other position you should perform a breast exam in is flat on your back. When you are lying down, the breast tissue lays evenly along the wall of your chest.

Lift the arm coinciding with the breast you are examining above your head (left arm with the left breast, right arm with the right breast),

and perform the same movements as in the shower.

Use both light and firm pressure and be cognizant of any pain. Keeping a journal of any abnormalities and follow-up doctor visits is a great way to stay on top of your overall breast health.



Providing Support

Finding out that someone you care about has breast cancer can be devastating. It is a natural impulse to want to offer support to help alleviate the stress or burden on your loved one.

But what do you say? What do they need?

BE SPECIFIC

While you might be willing to do anything that will help your friend or family member during this difficult time, it is important to offer specific aid. Keep in mind that the afflicted person is likely receiving multiple offers of assistance from a variety of people.

She is probably feeling alone and scared, and not sure who she can count on. Instead of asking a blanket, “Is there anything you need?” or “Let me know what I can do to help,” suggest a clear measure of support that you are willing to perform — and follow through on.

Here are a few tips to get you started:

TRANSPORTATION

Having breast cancer is an exhausting process filled with all types of medical treatments and hospital stays. Getting to and from treatment centers is



© FOTOLIA

often painful and tedious.

Offering to give your loved one a ride or pick him up is appreciated by him and his family members, who are most likely juggling the task.

HOUSEHOLD CHORES

Day-to-day life can be taxing

on someone who is fit and healthy. Imagine what it must be like when your body is fighting off disease and routinely filled with medical therapies.

While offering to do laundry, drop off dinner or mow the lawn might seem like a small gesture to you, it could feel life

changing to someone with breast cancer.

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Not everyone is great at listening — at really hearing people. People who are struggling with breast cancer are often in need of a supportive ear. Be a

caring friend, and listen to whatever your loved one needs to say.

Don't forget to reciprocate. Share your own feelings honestly. Just make sure you're clear on the level of discretion your loved one wishes to maintain, to respect her privacy.

Surviving Cancer

Being a cancer survivor is both a relief and a challenge in its own way. While you might feel incredibly grateful to be alive, you might face a set of circumstances you never imagined — ones that perhaps never occurred to you as you supported someone you loved through cancer.

Here are just five things that people don't like to talk about regarding life after cancer.

1. When you get to the other side, you won't believe it. At least not at first. There is always a small part of you that thought you wouldn't make it through, and you will likely live with the shock for a while.

2. It's difficult to just "move on." While people around you will be incredibly supportive during your battle, once you reach remission, they won't all be able to understand why you can't just "go back to normal." You will be a different person. Your views on almost everything will change. Be open and honest about what you're feeling, and reach out for professional help if necessary.

3. The guilt is real, and you will feel it. Why did you live and others die? There is no answering this question, but your feelings of guilt are valid, and it is not wrong to feel them. Your oncologist will be able to refer you to counselors or psychologists should this mental struggle begin to affect your daily life.

4. The worry of going out of remission is real, and you will also feel this. No matter how many fulfilling, happy years go by, you might always have fears of your cancer returning. This can be real struggle.

Studies show that survivors often deal with depression, anxiety, debt, lack of job opportunities and fear of romantic relationships. Keeping open lines of communication with your family,

friends, doctors and even psychologists can make a difference.

5. You might struggle with the phrase, "I beat cancer."

The fact of the matter is that it is not that simple a task. It is

not a battle that is always won by the most courageous. Some people can do everything right and still lose their battle with cancer.

6. And you will feel as if you can't talk about it. You might

believe you are supposed to feel grateful. The truth is that you will be dealing with a lot. Talk about it. Let people know your struggle is not over — even though your physical health has improved.



Breast Cancer's Impact

“It won't happen to me.” This is a very common thought among people about most terrible things in life. Sadly, the likelihood of it being true is very small when it comes to breast cancer.

The Breast Cancer Research Foundation has collected important statistics regarding the diagnosis and mortality rate of breast cancer. Here is what you need to know:

IN THE UNITED STATES

- After skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common cancer among women in the United States.
- More than 230,000 new cases of invasive breast cancer, and more than 60,000 new cases of breast carcinoma in situ (cancer that has not invaded nearby breast tissue) were diagnosed in 2015.
- More than 40,000 women in the United States will die each year from breast cancer.
- 440 men will die each year from breast cancer.
- There are more than 2.8 million breast cancer survivors in the United States. This includes people who are still being treated and those who have completed treatment.

AROUND THE WORLD

- Nearly 1.7 million new breast cancer cases were diagnosed in 2012.
- Breast cancer is the second most common cancer in men and women worldwide. In 2012, it represented 12 percent of all new cancer cases and 25 percent of all cancers in women.
- It is also the most frequently diagnosed cancer among women in 140 of the 184 countries worldwide.
- Since 2008, the worldwide occurrence of breast cancer has increased by more than 20 percent, and mortality has increased by 14 percent.
- As of 2012, Belgium had the highest rate of breast cancer, followed by Denmark and France.

