

# Women's Health

## Breast Cancer

*Treatment for breast cancer is number two in total claims dollars spent by the University of Arkansas System but only 17% of women over the age of 40 are being screened each year.*

### What is Breast Cancer?

It's normal for the body's cells to divide, grow, and die; it's when they abnormally grow out of control that they form a mass or lump called a tumor. There are two types of tumors: benign (non-cancerous) or malignant (cancerous). Breast cancer is a malignant tumor that starts from cells of the breast. The majority of breast tumors are benign, or abnormal growths.

### What Causes Breast Cancer?

Unfortunately, no one knows what specifically triggers breast cells to grow abnormally. Medical experts attribute the development of breast cancer to a combination of both unknown and known factors including genetics, lifestyle choices, and reproductive factors.

### Who is at Risk?

While the disease occurs mostly in women, men have a slight risk of developing the disease too. The American Cancer Society estimates that men will account for 1 percent of new cases in 2004.

While all women are at risk for developing breast cancer, risk factors (anything that increases your chance of getting the disease) include:

- **Age:** About 8 of 10 breast cancer cases are found in women over age 50;
- **Menstrual cycle:** Menstruating before age 12 or starting menopause after age 55;
- **Pregnancy:** Over age 30 at first birth or never giving birth;
- **Breast feeding:** Some studies show a link to lower risks for women who have breast fed;
- **Genetics:** About 1 case in 10 is linked to genetics;
- **Family history:** Having a mother, sister, or daughter with breast cancer doubles a woman's risk;
- **Radiation exposure:** Previous radiation therapy to the breast/chest area;
- **Birth control pills:** Use may increase risk slightly;
- **Alcohol:** Consumption of 1 or more drinks a day may increase a woman's risk slightly;
- **Race:** African-American women have slightly less risk than Caucasian women, but are more likely to die due to lack of early detection;
- **Overweight:** Excess weight after menopause increases risks.

### What are the Symptoms?

The most common sign of breast cancer is a new lump or mass that is painless, hard, and has uneven edges. But, symptoms of breast cancer vary from person to person and may include the following:

- a swelling of part of the breast
- skin irritation or dimpling
- nipple pain or the nipple turning inward
- redness or scaliness of the nipple or breast skin
- a nipple discharge (other than breast milk) that begins suddenly
- a lump in the underarm area

### Early Detection

Early detection saves lives. The American Cancer Society reports that the 5-year survival rate for all women diagnosed with breast cancer is 87 percent. With early detection (when the tumor is confined to the breast) the 5-year survival rate jumps to over 95 percent.

Early detection methods include:

- Breast self-exams.
- Note any changes in size, shape, color, unusual discharge, or feel of the breast.
- Clinical breast exams.
- Mammography.

### Is it Preventable?

Since the exact cause of breast cancer cannot be pinpointed, the disease is not considered to be preventable. While it won't eliminate a woman's chances, doctors do recommend a healthy, low-fat diet, regular exercise, and limiting alcohol consumption to help reduce breast cancer risks.

### The American Cancer Society's Recommendations

- Yearly mammograms are recommended starting at age 40 and continuing for as long as a woman is in good health.
- Clinical Breast Exam (CBE) should be part of a periodic health exam, about every 3 years for women in their 20s and 30s, and every year for women 40 and older.
- Women should know how their breasts normally feel and report any breast change promptly to their health care provider. BSE is an option for women starting in their 20s.
- Women at increased risk (e.g., family history, genetic tendency, past breast cancer) should talk with their doctors about the benefits and limitations of starting mammography screening earlier, having additional tests (breast ultrasound or MRI), or having more frequent exams.



**Did you know...** Following lung cancer, breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer-related death in women. If you have health care coverage with the University of Arkansas, your annual mammogram is covered at 100% with no out-of-pocket expense for you when you use a network provider. Get your mammogram at a network facility today.