

BREAST cancer is one of the hundreds of different types of cancer. Cancer is a disease that destroys body tissue and occurs when the normal process by which the cells of your body grow and divide goes out of control. The cells multiply too rapidly, creating excess tissue, or tumours. Tumours fall under two categories: benign and malignant. Benign tumours are not cancerous and usually pose little serious threat to health. Malignant tumors, however, are cancerous and are capable of spreading to neighboring tissues and organs. Doctors can test a small bit of a tumor under a microscope and tell you if it is malignant. If cancer cells break away from the tumour and enter the bloodstream, the cancer can easily spread to other parts of the body. This process is called metastasis, and it is very dangerous.

A women's risk of developing breast cancer is strongly influenced by her family history. That is to say, if her mother or sister have had breast cancer, then her chances of developing the disease double. If a women has already had cancer in one breast, then the risk of cancer appearing in the other also increases.

Detection and Prevention

Breast cancer treatment is most effective when the cancer is found early — before it has spread to other parts of the body. Conducting a monthly self-examination is an important step to early detection. If you still menstruate, the best time to examine your breasts is two to three days after your period ends. Abnormalities will be more easily noticeable at this point in the menstrual cycle when the breasts are not tender or swollen. After menopause, it doesn't matter at what time of month the examination is conducted as long as it is done monthly. Conducting a monthly self-

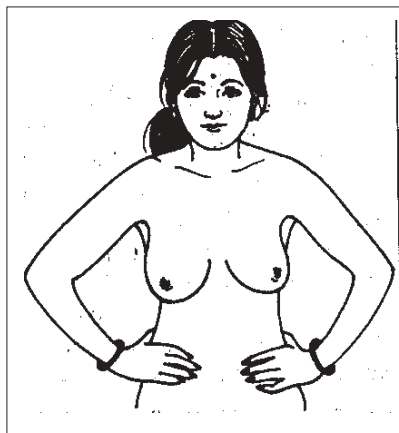
examination is essential since it enables you to become familiar with the way your breasts normally feel. After all, only by knowing what your breasts usually feel like will you be able to detect any abnormalities when they occur.

Breast Self-Examination

1) Stand before a mirror. Check both breasts for anything unusual. Look for a discharge from the nipples, puckering, dimpling, or scaling of the skin. The next two steps are done to check for any change in the shape or contour of your breasts. As you do them, your should be able to feel your chest muscles tighten.

2) Watching closely in the mirror, clasp your head and press your hands forwards.

3) Next, press your hands firmly on your hips and bow slightly toward the mirror as you pull your shoulders and elbows forward. Some women do the next part of the exam in the bath.



Facts About Breast Cancer

Roopa Chauhan



Your fingers will glide easily over soapy skin, so you can concentrate on feeling for changes inside the breast.

4) Raise your left arm. Use three or four fingers of your right hand to feel your left breast firmly, carefully, and thoroughly. Beginning at the outer edge, press the flat part of your fingers in small circles, moving the circles slowly around the breast. Gradually work toward the nipple. Be sure to cover the whole breast. Pay special attention to the area between the breast and the underarm, including the underarm area itself. Feel for any unusual lump or mass under the skin.

5) Gently squeeze the nipple and look for a discharge. (if you have any discharge during the month — whether or not it is during breast self-examination — see your doctor.) Repeat the exam on your right breast.

6) Steps four and five should be repeated lying down. Lie flat on your

back, with your left arm over your head and a pillow or folded towel under your left shoulder. This position flattens the breast and makes it easier to check it. Use the same circular motion described above. Repeat on your right breast.

It is important to know that 80-85 percent of breast lumps found are not cancerous, especially in young women. However, if you notice any of the above symptoms, you should see your physician as soon as possible, as malignant tumours are life threatening unless discovered at an early stage.

The next step in early detection is having a doctor examine your breasts once a year. Yearly mammograms or breast x-rays are highly recommended for women over 50 - especially if they have already had breast cancer. Mammograms are useful in detecting cancerous tumours before they can be felt. Many people believe that mammograms increase a woman's risk of developing breast cancer due to the amount of radiation to which mammography exposes her. However, according to a study published in *A Categorical Course in RSNA physics: Technical Aspects of Breast Cancer*: "No woman has been shown to have developed breast cancer as a result of mammography, not even from multiple studies performed over many years with doses higher than the current permissible doses." So the radiation risks involved in mammography are actually quite minimal. In fact, when correctly done, the amount of radiation to which women are exposed during mammography is well below the yearly permissible dose for breasts. Mammograms should emit .12 milirads of radiation. Some of this radiation is absorbed by the skin so the dose inside the breasts is slightly less. Parts of the body can take up to 25 milirads of radiation, which gives

you an idea of how small an amount .12 milirads is. Basically, the advantages of mammography greatly outweigh the disadvantages - especially since radiation-induced cancer caused by frequent mammograms is very unlikely. Unfortunately, in India, even for middle class women, there are few hospitals or clinics where mammography is available.

Your first mammogram

Women should begin having mammograms once every two years around the ages of 35 to 40. However, if your family has a history of breast cancer, then a doctor might advise you to have yearly mammograms, beginning sometimes as early as 30, depending on your individual case history. After the age of 50, they should be done every year.

Prevention

Breast cancer is not stress related. There is, however, a correlation between breast cancer and a diet high in

cholesterol and fat. This may explain why breast cancer is more common among middle and upper class women, whose diets include heavy, greasy foods, than among women of poorer communities who, out of economic necessity, eat more simply. This is the reason why breast cancer is seen as a disease which inflicts more rich than poor women. □

Institutions which provide mammography in Delhi:

Col. Pant's Imaging Center

A 22 Green Park (Main)
New Delhi, 110 016
Phone: 685 5656

The Institute of Nuclear Medicine & Allied Sciences

Lucknow Marg, Delhi, 110 007
Phone: 291 0098

Diwan Chand Satyapal Agarwal

10 B Kasturba Gandhi Marg
New Delhi 110 001
Phone: 332 2497 & 332 9336

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