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SOURCE: CANVA

A WOMAN'S GUIDE TO BREAST CANCER

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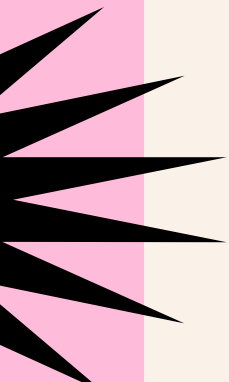
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INTRODUCTION



This manual is to explain breast cancer to women. The goal is for women to understand their diagnoses as well as educate women to prevent future breast cancer cases. The manual outlines basic information about breast cancer, myths, symptoms, prevention/risks, treatment, and resources.



WHAT IS BREAST CANCER?

Cancer is a disease in which there is unregulated growth of cells in breast tissue. The cells begin to have unregulated growth because their code or DNA becomes damaged. These cells begin growing and reproducing when the body does not need new cells. This causes masses of tissue called tumors to form.¹

The dangers

These cancerous cells are referred to as malignant and are deadly due to their ability to spread to other parts of the body. Cancer cells spread through the lymph system, tissue, or blood.²



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MYTHS

COMMON MYTHS ABOUT BREAST CANCER:

Cancer is caused by injuries- Breast injuries do not cause breast cancer but after having an injury to the breast there may be scarring, bleeding, or pain that leads to a healthcare professional finding cancer. Breasts with scarring can sometimes also be more difficult to screen for cancer. Simply put the injury only draws attention to cancer that was already there or makes it more difficult to find the cancer in the future.¹

Bigger breasts are more at risk- There is no correlation between larger breasts and an increase in cancer. There is however an increased risk for women who are obese or lack regular exercise.²

Only affects woman past forty-five - Although most breast cancer cases are in middle aged and older women, cancer can affect anyone. In the US 9% of breast cancer cases are in women who are under forty-five.³ It is important to start screening even if you are under forty-five, especially if an immediate family member has had breast cancer.³

Cancer is caused by sugar - Ingesting sugar does not cause cancer although sugar can cause obesity which increases your risk for breast cancer. Having a poor diet in general can increase your risk of developing breast cancer. If you are worried about developing breast cancer you could maintain a healthy diet by cutting out unnecessary sugary foods.⁴

Putting your phone in your bra causes breast cancer- There is no evidence to support that phones cause breast cancer. Scientists have been tracking the long-term negative effects of daily phone usage and as phone usage become more common, cancer rates have not increased.⁶

MYTHS

COMMON MYTHS ABOUT BREAST CANCER:

Breast cancer only affects women - Breast cancer does not only affect women but men too. Although less common men are still capable of developing breast cancer, and they are more likely to die from it. This higher mortality risk is mostly due to men not being informed on breast cancer signs and not going to the doctor sooner.⁷

A mammogram can cause cancer - Mammograms do not cause cancer as mammograms are tools that were created to find breast cancer⁸. The pressure from a mammogram does not cause cancer and neither does the small amount of radiation used.⁹

You will know you have breast cancer if you find a lump - Finding a lump isn't the only symptom of breast cancer and not all lumps are cancerous. Other symptoms of breast cancer can include swelling, irritation, pain, or nipple discharge. Anything that is out of place or concerning should be followed up by a doctor.⁸

You only get breast cancer if your family has a history of it – It doesn't matter if you have a family history or not, anyone can develop breast cancer. It is true that a family history can increase your chances, but most women diagnosed with breast cancer have no family history. Of women diagnosed only 1/10 women with breast cancer have a family history.⁸



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STAGES OF BREAST CANCER

Cancer can be broken up into four stages and are written as roman numerals. The stages are broken up based on the size of the cancerous mass, what has been infected with cancer, and how far the cancer has spread.¹



SOURCE: CANVA.COM

STAGE I

The cancer is small and has not spread to other part of the body. At this stage the cancer is usually easily treatable.¹

STAGE II

The cancer has grown but has still not spread to other parts of the body. Sometimes it can mean that the cancer has spread to the lymph nodes close to the area it formed.¹

STAGE III

The cancer has spread to surrounding areas and has infected the lymph nodes.¹

STAGE IV

The cancer has spread to another part of the body or organ.¹

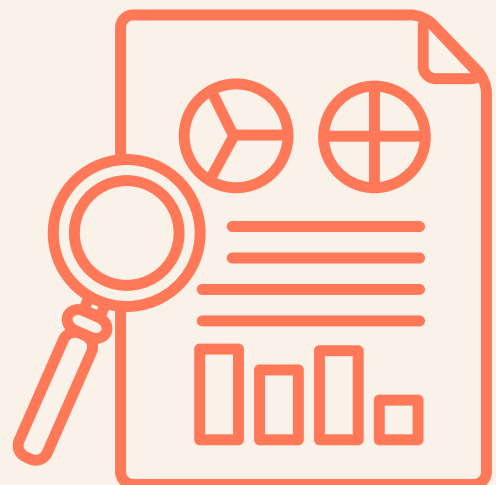
STAGES OF BREAST CANCER

WHY ARE THE STAGES IMPORTANT?

Common Language - Doctors and other members of a medical team have terms that they all know and memorize so that they can explain a situation quickly. Having a shared understanding of the stages makes it easy for health professionals to communicate what stage the cancer is at.¹

Treatment - When being treated for cancer, a hospital has set guidelines and treatment options depending on what stage of cancer you have been diagnosed with. Someone at stage I may have a different treatment guideline than someone at stage III.¹ By knowing what stage the cancer has reached the doctors can have a better understanding of what treatments you may need.²

Tracking – Having a universal set guideline for monitoring the stages of cancer also makes it easier to track the spread. Cancer stages depend on how far it has spread, what it has spread to, and how large the tumor is. By having this set standard, it becomes easier to track the severity.¹

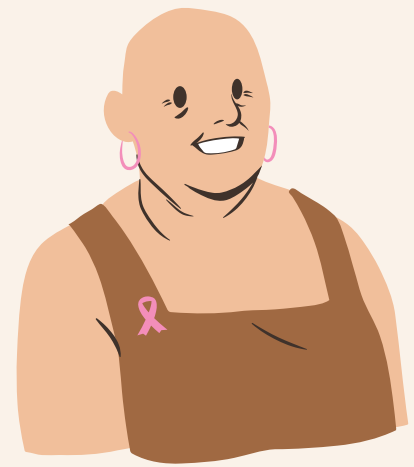


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SIGNS & SYMPTOMS



Early stages of cancer may be difficult to spot however the following symptoms are potential signs that you have developed breast cancer. Someone who has breast cancer may have multiple symptoms provided or may only have one noticed symptom. Any symptom should be followed up by a healthcare provider. ¹

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A lump in the breast.¹ | Pain on or around the nipple.¹ |
| Unexplained swelling of the breast.¹ | Discharge coming from the nipples (other than breast milk).¹ |
| The skin of the breast has strange skin formations and irritation.¹ | Pain in any area of the breast.¹ |
| The skin around the nipple is flakey and red.¹ | The breast size or shape changing. ¹ |
| Nipple is turned inward.² | Lymph nodes near the armpits are swollen.² |

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RISK FACTORS

Breast Cancer **risk factors** include some you aren't able to change, such as having a family history of breast cancer, being a woman, and getting older. However, there are other risk factors that you can change to help lower the likelihood of developing breast cancer. ¹

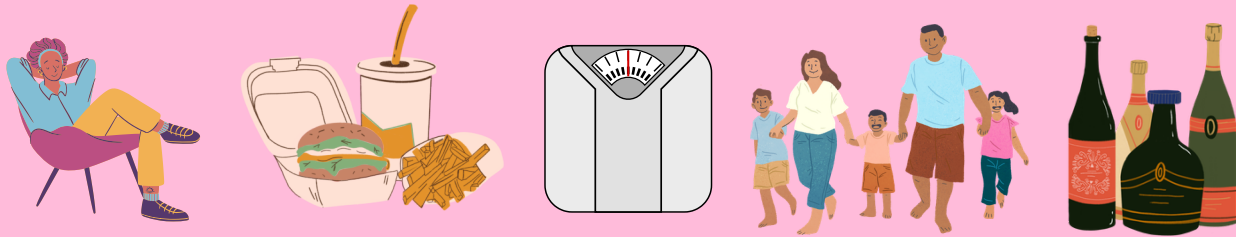
RISK FACTORS YOU CAN'T CONTROL:

- **Gender**
 - Breast cancer can affect both men and women. However, breast cancer occurs nearly 100 times more often in women than in men.¹
- **Age**
 - Breast cancer risk goes up as you get older. About 2 out of 3 invasive breast cancers are found in women 55 years old and up.²
- **Race**
 - Breast Cancer is diagnosed slightly more often in Caucasian women than women of other races. African American women are more likely to develop more aggressive, more advanced-stage breast cancer diagnosed at a young age.³
- **Family History**
 - Women with sisters, mothers, or daughters who have been diagnosed with breast cancer have a higher risk of developing this disease.³
- **Genetics**
 - Inherited changes (mutations) to certain genes increase the risk of breast and ovarian cancer.⁴

Risk factor: A risk factor is something that increases the chances of something terrible happening, like a disease or an accident.⁴



RISK FACTORS



RISK FACTORS YOU CAN CONTROL:

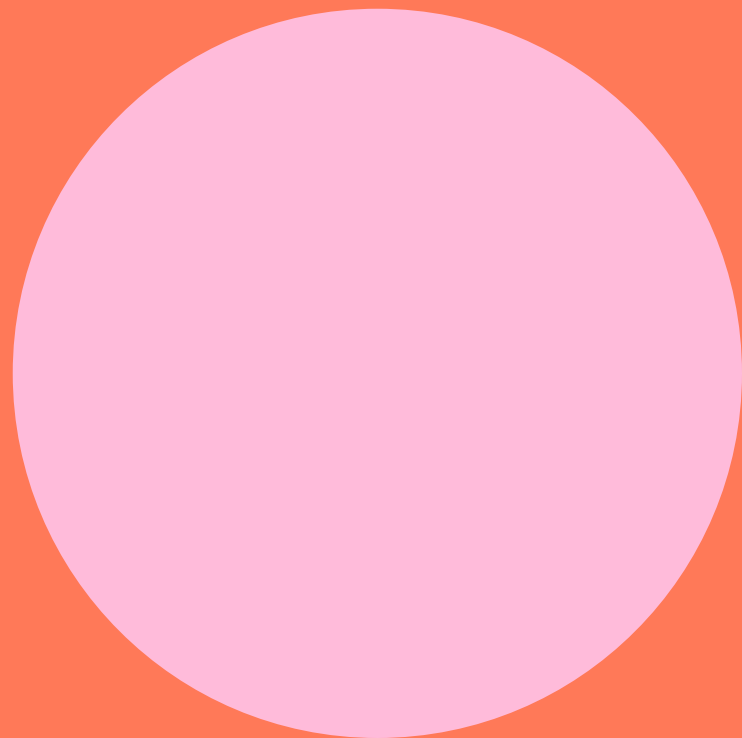
- **Lack of physical activity**
 - A sedentary lifestyle with little physical activity can increase your risk for breast cancer.¹
- **Poor diet**
 - A diet high in saturated fats and low in fruits and vegetables may raise your risk for developing breast cancer.²
- **Weight**
 - Weight and obesity in childhood, adolescence, and after menopause can elevate a woman's risk of breast cancer later in life.³
- **Family History**
 - Women with sisters, mothers, or daughters who have been diagnosed with breast cancer have a higher risk of developing this disease.²
- **Alcohol use**
 - Inherited changes (mutations) to certain genes increase the risk of breast and ovarian cancer.²

1 in **8** women are diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime.⁴



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3. Breast cancer risk factors. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Accessed April 29, 2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/breast-cancer/risk-factors/index.html>
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PREVENTION

What's prevention? Action taken to lower the chance of getting cancer.¹

Preventive measures for Breast Cancer



The following steps can aid a person to overcome Breast Cancer:



Maintaining healthy weight & exercise regularly



Considering breastfeeding for children



Avoid or Limit alcohol consumption



Limit using hormone medication



Watch out for changes to your breasts

SOURCE: PACE HOSPITAL⁶

WHILE THERE'S NO GUARANTEED WAY TO PREVENT BREAST CANCER, THERE ARE STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO POSSIBLY REDUCE YOUR RISK. THIS CAN BE PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT FOR WOMEN WITH SPECIFIC RISK FACTORS, LIKE A STRONG FAMILY HISTORY OR INHERITED GENETIC CHANGES.¹

PREVENTION

HOW YOU CAN LOWER YOUR RISK:

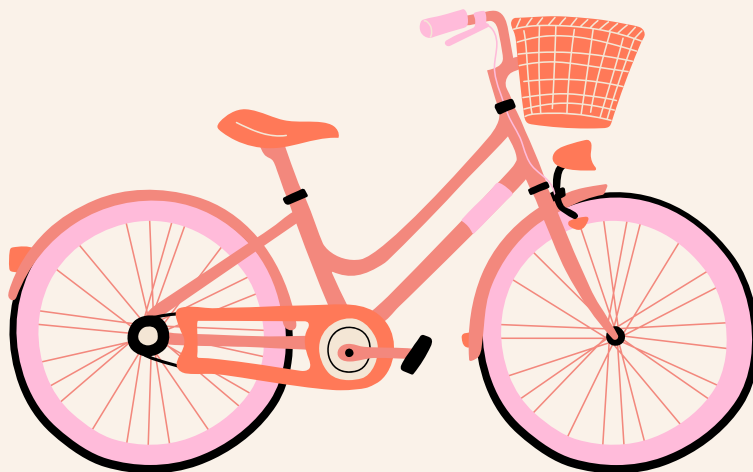
Maintain healthy weight- Increased body weight and weight gain as an adult are linked with a higher risk of breast cancer after menopause. Avoid excess weight gain by balancing your food intake with physical activity.²

Physical activity- Moderate to vigorous physical activity is linked with lower breast cancer risk. The American Cancer Society recommends that adults get at least 150-300 minutes of moderate intensity or 75-150 minutes of vigorous intensity activity each week (or combination of these), spread out throughout the week.²

Moderate Activity is when you move enough to breathe a little harder, like when you take a fast walk. Your heart beats a little faster, and you can breathe more, but you can still talk- just not sing.²

Vigorous Activity means you are moving a lot harder. Your heart beats fast, you sweat more, and you breathe much faster.²

Avoid or limit alcohol- Drinking alcohol can raise the risk of breast cancer. Even small amounts increase your risk. It's safest not to drink alcohol at all, but if women do choose to drink, they should have no more than one drink a day. One drink means 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of hard liquor (like whiskey or vodka).²



SOURCE: CANVA

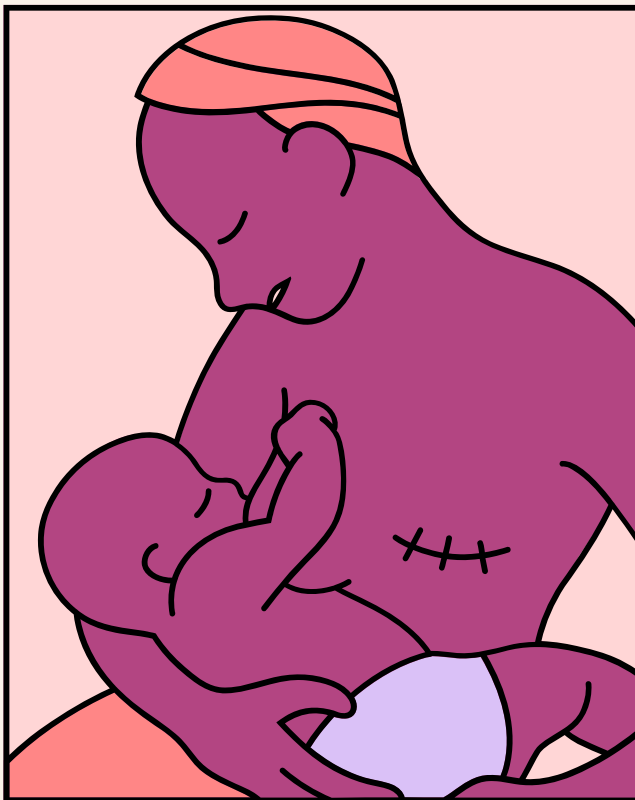
PREVENTION

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Breastfeeding- Women who breastfeed for several months after having a baby may lower their risk of getting breast cancer.

Hormone therapy- Using hormone therapy after menopause can raise the risk of breast cancer. To stay safe, women should talk to their doctor about other ways to treat menopause symptoms without using hormones.²



SOURCE: CANVA

PREVENTION

IF YOU'RE AT INCREASED RISK:

Genetic counseling- If there's a reason to think you may have a gene change that raises your risk of breast cancer, like having a strong family history or a family member with a known gene mutation you should talk to your doctor. They can help you decide if genetic counseling and testing are right for you.²

Medicine- Some prescriptions can help lower the risk of breast cancer in women who are at higher risk. These medicines work by blocking the effects of estrogen in breast tissue or by lowering estrogen levels in the body. Some can be used before menopause, while others are only for women who have already gone through menopause.²

Because these medicines can have side effects, it's important to talk to a healthcare provider to understand the benefits and risks before starting treatment.²



SOURCE: CANVA

PREVENTION

IF YOU'RE AT INCREASED RISK:

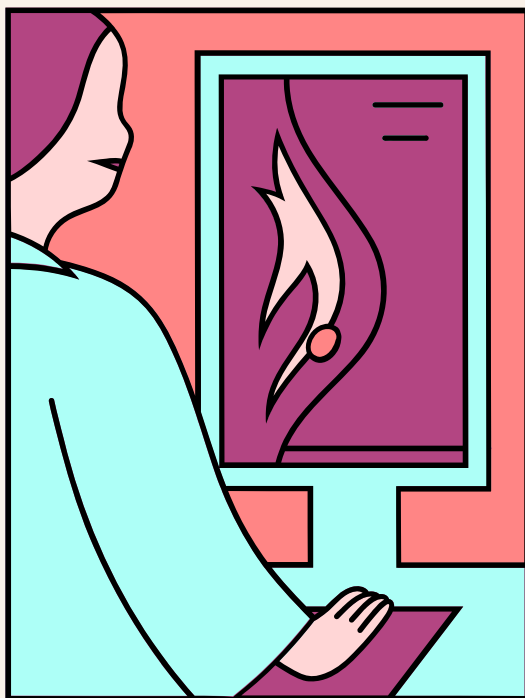
Surgery- For a small amount of women who have a very risk of breast cancer, surgery to remove the breasts may be an option. Another choice could be surgery to remove the ovaries, which make most of the body's estrogen. Surgery can lower the risk of breast cancer, but it does not remove the risk completely. It can also cause side effects.²

It's important to talk with a health care provider to understand your personal risk and learn how these options might help before making a decision.²

Close observation- For women at higher risk of breast cancer who choose not to take medicine or have surgery, healthcare providers may suggest close monitoring instead. This plan might include:

- More frequent check-ups (every 6-12 months), for breast exams and risk updates
- Starting yearly mammograms at a younger age
- Possibly adding another screening test, like an MRI

This approach does not lower the risk of getting breast cancer, but it may help find cancer early, when it is easier to treat.²



SOURCE: CANVA

SCREENING

What's a screening? A type of test or check-up that looks for diseases before you have any symptoms.³

The Task Force (An organization made up of doctors and disease experts) recommends that women who are 40-74 years old and are at average risk for breast cancer get a mammogram every 2 years.³

Different screening recommendations may be used for women at higher than average risk.³

Types of Tests:

Mammogram- An x-ray picture of the breast³

- Mammograms are one of the best ways to find breast cancer early, when treatment is easier. They can spot cancer before it grows big enough to feel or cause any signs.³
- Getting regular mammograms can help lower the chance of dying from breast cancer.³

Breast magnetic resonance imaging (MRI)- Uses magnets and radio waves to take pictures of the breasts³

- MRIs are used along with mammograms to check women who have a high risk of breast cancer.³
- Because breast MRIs can sometimes look abnormal even when there is no cancer, they are not used for women who have an average risk.³

Clinical breast exam- A healthcare provider checks the breasts by using their hands to feel for lumps or other changes.³



SCREENING

How to perform a self-breast examination:

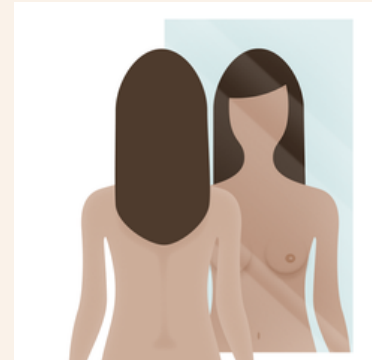
Step 1: Look at your breasts

Start by sitting or standing in front of a mirror without a shirt or bra.

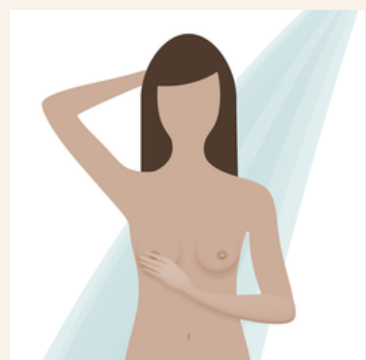
When looking at your breasts:⁴

- Keep your arms at your sides and look for changes like puckering, dimpling, or changes in size, shape, or balance.⁴
- Check if either nipple has turned inward.⁴
- Press your hands on your hips and look for any changes.⁴
- Raise your arms over your head and press your palms together while looking for changes.⁴
- Lift each breast to check if the ridges along the bottom are even.⁴

If you have trouble seeing clearly, ask a trusted family member or friend to help.⁴



SOURCE:SOURCE:
NATIONAL BREAST
CANCER FOUNDATION⁷

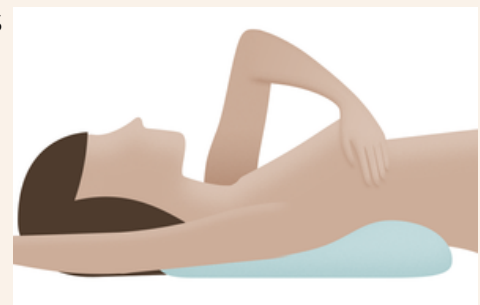


SOURCE:SOURCE:
NATIONAL BREAST
CANCER FOUNDATION⁷

Step 2: Feel your breasts

You can examine your breasts either lying down or in the shower:

- **Lying down:** Lying on your back helps spread out the breast tissue, making it thinner and easier to feel.⁴
- **In the shower:** Use soap to help your fingers slide smoothly over the skin.⁴



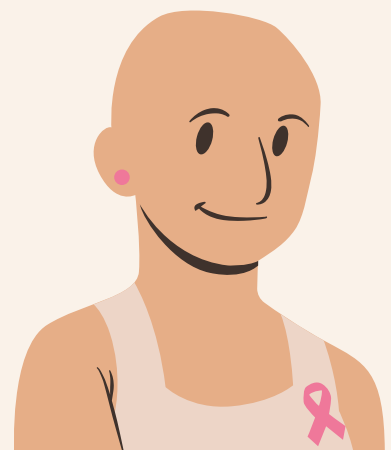
SOURCE:SOURCE: NATIONAL
BREAST CANCER FOUNDATION⁷

SCREENING

How to perform a self-breast examination:

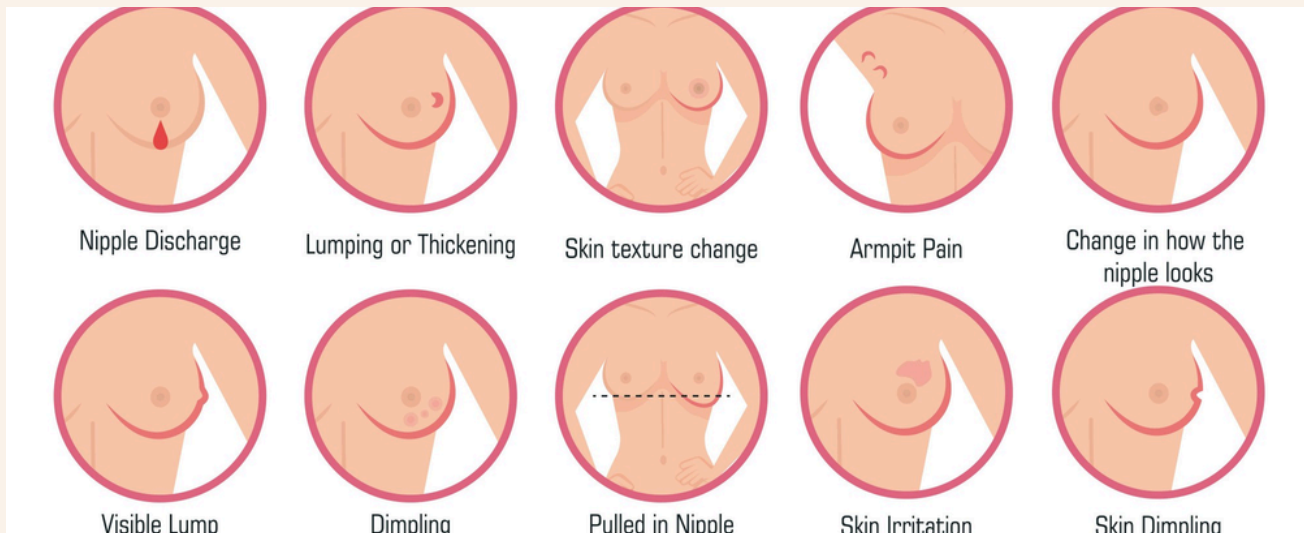
Tips for feeling your breasts:

- Use the pads of your three middle fingers (not the fingertips).⁴
- Use different levels of pressure:
 - Light pressure to feel tissue near the skin.⁴
 - Medium pressure for tissue a little deeper.⁴
 - Firm pressure to feel tissue near the chest and ribs.⁴
- Take your time- go slowly and carefully.⁴
- Follow a pattern:
 - Imagine your breast like a clock or a pie.⁴
 - Start near the collarbone and move from the outer edge toward the nipple section by section.⁴



SCREENING

Results: What's normal and when to call a doctor



SOURCE: PACE HOSPITAL⁶

What's normal:

- It's normal for breasts to feel different in different places.⁵
- Your breasts may feel different during different times in your menstrual cycle.⁵
- A firm ridge along the bottom of the breast can be normal.⁵
- Breasts usually change in look and feel as you age.⁵

When to contact a healthcare professional:

Make an appointment if you notice:

- A hard lump or knot near your underarm.⁵
- A nipple that is pulled inward (instead of sticking out).⁵
- Blood coming from the nipple.⁵
- Changes in breast skin color, warmth, swelling, or pain.⁵
- A change in the way your breasts look or feel, like thickening or fullness.⁵
- Dimples, puckers, bulges, or ridges on your skin.⁵
- Itching, sores, or rashes on the breast.⁵

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TREATMENT

Treatment for breast cancer usually begins with surgery to remove the cancer. After surgery, most people will receive additional treatments like radiation, chemotherapy, or hormone therapy. Some people may have chemotherapy or hormone therapy before surgery to shrink the cancer, making it easier to remove.¹



Your treatment plan will be based on the type of breast cancer you have. Your healthcare team will look at factors like the stage of the cancer, how fast it's growing, and whether the cancer cells are affected by hormones. They will also consider your overall health and personal preferences.¹

There are many different treatment options for breast cancer. The choices can feel overwhelming, and it's important to make decisions that are best for you. You may want to get a second opinion from a breast cancer specialist at a clinic or breast center. Talking to others who have gone through similar treatments can also help.¹

TREATMENT

LOCAL TREATMENTS 01.

Some treatments, like surgery and radiation, are called **local treatments** because they focus on the tumor without affecting the rest of the body.

Most women with breast cancer will have surgery to remove the tumor. Depending on the type and stage of the cancer, other treatments may also be needed. These treatments might happen before surgery, after surgery, or both.²

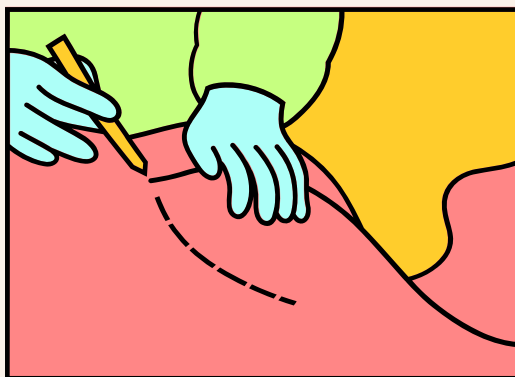
There are **two** main types of surgery to remove breast cancer:

- **Breast-conserving surgery:**

- Removes the breast cancer and some normal tissue around it, but not the whole breast.²
- This type of surgery may also be called a lumpectomy, quadrantectomy, partial mastectomy, or segmental mastectomy.²

- **Mastectomy:**

- Surgery to remove the entire breast, including all breast tissue and sometimes nearby tissues.²
- There are different types of mastectomies. Some women choose to have both breasts removed, which is called a double mastectomy.²



SOURCE: CANVA

Radiation therapy- Uses high energy rays or particles to kill cancer cells. Some women with breast cancer will need radiation along with other treatments.

Radiation therapy might be used in different ways depending on the stage of the cancer and other factors:²

- After breast-conserving surgery to lower the chance of the cancer coming back in the same breast or nearby lymph nodes.²
- After a mastectomy if the tumor was larger than 5 cm (about 2 inches), if cancer was found in many lymph nodes, or if cancer cells were found close to the edges of the removed tissue.²
- If the cancer has spread to other parts of the body, like the bones, spinal cord, or brain.²

TREATMENT

The **main** types of radiation therapy that can be used to treat breast cancer are:

- **External beam radiation therapy:**²
 - Most common type of radiation therapy for women with breast cancer.²
 - A machine outside the body aims radiation at the area where the cancer was found.²
 - The areas that need radiation depend on whether you have a mastectomy or breast-conserving surgery, and whether the cancer spread to nearby lymph nodes.²
- **Brachytherapy:**
 - Also called internal radiation.²
 - Instead of using a machine outside the body, a small device with radioactive seeds or pellets is placed inside the breast tissue for a short time, in the area where the cancer was removed.²
 - For some women who had breast-conserving surgery, brachytherapy can be used by itself instead of giving radiation to the whole breast. However, things like the size and location of the tumor can affect whether brachytherapy is a good option.²



SOURCE: CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION³

TREATMENT

SYSTEMIC TREATMENTS 02.

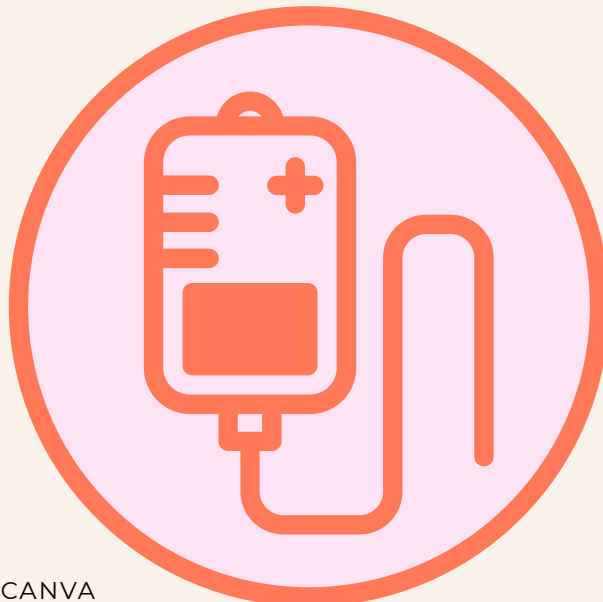
Medicines used to treat breast cancer are called systemic therapies, because they travel through the whole body and can reach cancer cells almost anywhere. These medicines can be taken by mouth, injected into a muscle, or given through a vein into the bloodstream. The type of drug treatment you receive depends on the kind of breast cancer you have. Different types of drugs may be used, including:²

- **Chemotherapy:**

- Chemotherapy (chemo) uses special medicines to kill cancer cells. The drugs can be given through a vein (IV) or taken by mouth. Once in the bloodstream, the medicine travels throughout the body to reach cancer cells.²
- If cancer spreads to the spinal fluid, the liquid that surrounds and protects the brain and spinal cord, chemo may be given directly into that area. This is called intrathecal chemotherapy.²

- **Hormone therapy:**

- Some types of breast cancer grow because of hormones like estrogen and progesterone. The cancer cells have special proteins called receptors that attach to these hormones, helping the cancer grow.²
- Hormone therapy (also called endocrine therapy) works by blocking the hormones from attaching to the receptors. This treatment can reach cancer cells almost anywhere in the body, not just in the breast.²
- Hormone therapy is usually recommended for women whose tumors are hormone receptor-positive. It does not work for tumors that are hormone receptor-negative.²
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TREATMENT

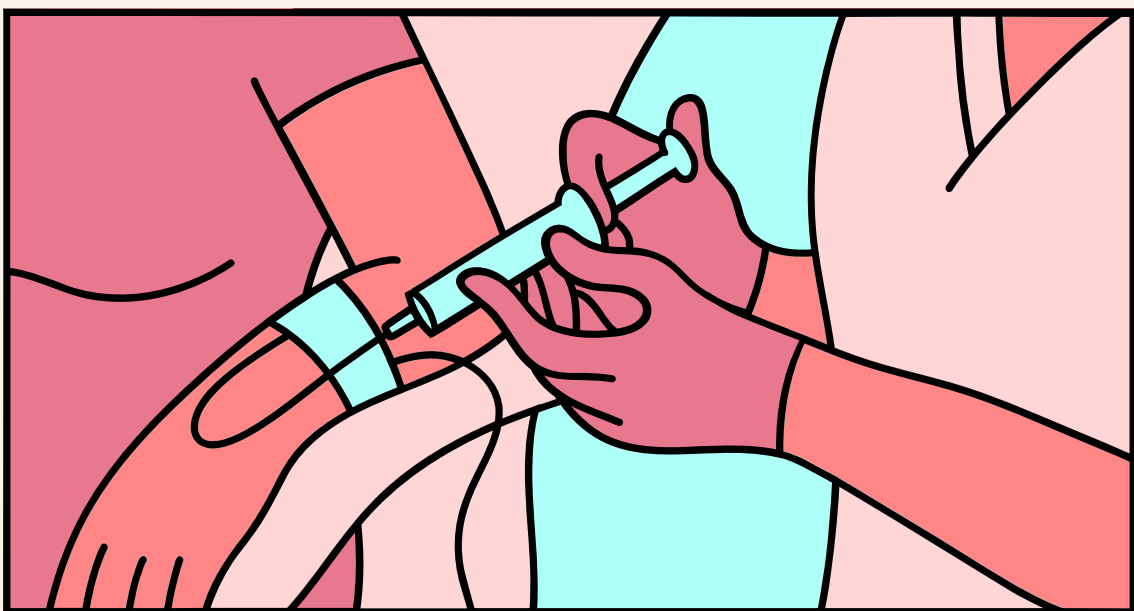
SYSTEMIC TREATMENTS 03.

- **Targeted drug therapy:**

- Targeted therapy uses special medicines that attack specific proteins in breast cancer cells. These proteins help the cancer cells grow, spread, and survive.² Targeted drugs work by destroying cancer cells or slowing their growth.
- Some targeted drugs, also help the immune system fight the cancer. This means they can sometimes be considered a type of immunotherapy as well.²
- Like chemotherapy, targeted therapy drugs travel through the bloodstream and can reach cancer anywhere in the body. They can sometimes work even when chemotherapy does not, and help other treatments work better.²

- **Immunotherapy:**

- Immunotherapy uses medicines to help a person's own immune system find and destroy cancer cells more effectively. These drugs work by targeting certain proteins that control the immune response. Their side effects are different from those of chemotherapy.²
- Some immunotherapy drugs, like monoclonal antibodies, can also act as targeted therapy by blocking specific proteins on cancer cells to stop them from growing.²



SOURCE: CANVA

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2. Breast cancer treatment: Treatment options for breast cancer. Breast Cancer Treatment | Treatment Options for Breast Cancer | American Cancer Society. Accessed April 29, 2025. <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/types/breast-cancer/treatment.html>
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SUPPORT GROUPS AND RESOURCES

SUPPORT GROUPS:

Support groups help increase the support network of the people in the group. They can be an important resource for people with breast cancer.¹

TYPES OF SUPPORT GROUPS:

Some support groups mainly give information and education, like what to expect during chemotherapy and tips for handling treatment.¹

Other groups focus more on emotional support, giving people a space to share their feelings and experiences.¹

- In person and virtual support groups: Facilitate connections among individuals affected by breast cancer.¹
- Specialized groups: Tailored for specific needs, such as metastatic breast cancer, young survivors, or caregivers.¹

It might take a few visits to a group before you feel comfortable enough to talk or ask questions- and that's okay!

BREAST CANCER SUPPORT GROUPS AND RESOURCES IN ATHENS, GA:

- Loran Smith Center for Cancer Support (Piedmont Athens Regional)²
- University Cancer and Blood Center³
- Athens Nurses Clinic⁴
- The Cancer Foundation⁵

ONLINE BREAST CANCER SUPPORT GROUPS AND RESOURCES:

- Breastcancer.org provides free virtual community support groups.¹
- The American Cancer Society offers an online support network with discussion boards, chat rooms, and private emails.¹



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