

Women's Health

Breast Cancer



What are the symptoms?

Early breast cancer usually doesn't show symptoms. But as the tumour grows, it can change how the breast looks or feels. Common changes include:

- A lump or thickening in or near the breast or in the armpit area
- A change in the size or shape of the breast
- Dimpling or puckering in the skin of the breast
- The nipple becoming inverted (turning inward into the breast)
- Abnormal discharge from the nipple
- Scaly, red, or swollen skin on the breast, nipple, or areola (the dark area surrounding the nipple)
- The skin of the breast taking on an orange peel look or feel.

Early detection of breast cancer:

If breast cancer is found early, there are more treatment options and a better chance for survival. Even if you feel healthy now, just being a woman and getting older puts you at risk for breast cancer. Getting checked regularly can put your mind at ease. Finding cancer early may save your life. Know how your breasts normally look and feel.

Discuss any changes you observe with your health practitioner. Breast self-examination (BSE) should be done once a month during ovulation (preferably at the same time of day). Many women have a pattern of lumpiness in their breasts, which is normal. However, if you feel or see any change in your breasts or underarms, ask your health practitioner to do a clinical breast examination (CBE) and/or refer you for further tests.

SureTouch is a screening device that detects lumps, as small as 5mm, in the breast. Explored and verified by CANSA, this device is an effective screening method, considered to be better than a BSE (breast self-examination) but does not replace a mammogram. Screening is available at most CANSA Care Centres.

A CBE is a visual and manual examination done by a health practitioner of the entire breast - from the collarbone to the bra line, and from the armpit to the breastbone. If a CBE by a health practitioner is not part of your routine medical checkup, ask for it.

Women, 40 or older, or who have other risk factors such as mutated BRCA1/2 gene should be referred for a mammogram every year.

Clinical Breast Examinations

are available
at CANSA's Care
Centres & Mobile
Health Clinics
country-wide



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www.cansa.org.za

Women and men get breast cancer. Are you at risk? Find out!

You have a higher risk for breast cancer if...	Why?
<i>You are older than 50</i>	The chance of getting breast cancer increases as you get older. However, even though most women are over 50 years old when they are diagnosed, women in their twenties or thirties are increasingly diagnosed with breast cancer.
<i>You have a close family member with breast cancer</i>	Your risk of breast cancer is higher if your grandparent, parent, sibling or daughter had breast cancer. The risk is even higher if your family member had it before age 50. Ask your health practitioner about genetic counselling.
<i>You have a personal history of cancer and have received treatment for it</i>	Women who have received high dose chemotherapy or who have had radiation therapy to the chest (including the breasts) before age 30 are at an increased risk for breast cancer. Studies show that the younger a woman is when receiving treatment, the higher her risk for breast cancer later in life.
<i>Your breast tissue is very dense</i>	Women whose mammograms show a larger area of dense tissue than those of women of the same age are at increased risk for breast cancer. An ultrasound may be required as dense breast tissue can make it difficult to detect possible tumours.
<i>You have never given birth or your first confinement was after the age of 35</i>	Women who never had children are at an increased risk for breast cancer. Pregnancy reduces a woman's total number of lifetime menstrual cycles, which may be the reason.
<i>You're using, or have recently used birth control pills (oral contraceptives) for many years</i>	Studies have found that women using oral contraceptives have a greater risk for breast cancer than women who have never used it. The risk decreases if women stop using it for 10 years or more.
<i>You are post-menopausal and are using combination hormone replacement therapy (HRT) (combination of oestrogen and progesterone)</i>	Breast cancer risk in women increases the most during the first 2 to 3 years of taking combined HRT. Combination HRT increases the likelihood that the cancer may be found at a more advanced stage, possibly because it reduces the effectiveness of mammograms by increasing breast density. Higher-dose combination HRT increases breast cancer risk more than lower-dose combination HRT. Breast cancer risk is reduced, 5 years after discontinuing combination treatment.
<i>You have 2 or more standard alcoholic drinks per day</i>	The use of alcohol is clearly linked to an increased risk of developing breast cancer. The risk increases with the amount of alcohol consumed. Those who have 2 or more standard drinks daily have almost twice the risk of those who drink no alcohol. Excessive alcohol use is also known to increase the risk of developing cancers of the mouth, throat, oesophagus and liver.
<i>Obesity</i>	Obesity has been linked to breast cancer. Studies have shown that lack of physical activity increases cancer risk.
<i>Most individuals who have some risk factors never develop breast cancer.</i>	<i>You can reduce your risk for breast cancer by adopting a balanced lifestyle and avoiding environmental carcinogens. Be physically active, don't be overweight and limit your alcohol intake. Women who breastfeed for at least 18 months can further reduce their (and their baby's) risk.</i>

If you found this information helpful and would like to assist CANSA in funding further research and education, please consider making a donation at any of our CANSA Care Centres country-wide

For more information on breast cancer contact CANSA



072 197 9305 English and Afrikaans
071 867 3530 Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho and Siswati



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