

# Breast Cancer Factsheet

## The Bottom-line... Be "Breast Aware"

By regularly looking at and feeling your breasts, you will know what is normal for you and you will be able to pick up when there are any new or unusual breast changes. Get to know your breasts, and if you do notice any new or unusual changes, please go to your nearest clinic as soon as possible. More than 90% of breast lumps are discovered by women themselves. Breast cancers that are diagnosed early have a better chance of being cured. So don't delay if you find a new or unusual change in your breasts.

You might find the following tips helpful in checking your breasts:

- **Look** at your breasts and nipples in the mirror and check for:
  - A change in the size or shape of your breast or nipple
  - A change in the skin over the breast such as redness or dimpling
  - A nipple discharge, rash or inversion
- **Feel** your breasts, remembering to feel up to your collarbone, below your bra-line and under your armpit and check for a new lump or lumpiness, especially if its in one breast

## I haven't noticed any changes in my breasts; do I still need to go for any tests?

A mammogram is an X-ray of the breast. It is used in older women (usually over 35 years of age). Younger women's breasts are too dense which makes it difficult to use this test. A mammogram can be used to detect a cancer before you notice any changes in your breast. This is called a "screening mammogram". But it may also pick up changes that are not cancer. Further tests e.g. a Fine Needle Biopsy (taking a sample of breast tissue with a needle) would be needed if the mammogram was abnormal, to then decide if there is a cancer (also called a malignancy). In some developed countries, mammograms are provided to healthy women over 50 years every 1 to 2 years to try to detect breast cancers at early stages before a lump or other changes are noticed. Due to the burden of disease on the public health system in South Africa, such a programme cannot be afforded in the public sector for women that do not have any breast complaints. Mammography services are primarily used for women that have breast complaints or symptoms. If you are worried and think that you need this test, then you may consult your doctor or nurse for advice.

## Breast Changes

Be on the look-out for the following changes:

- A new lump or lumpiness, especially if it is in only one breast
- A change in the shape or size of your breast
- A change to the nipple, such as redness, ulceration, crusting or inversion
- A nipple discharge that comes without squeezing
- A change in the skin of your breast, such as redness or dimpling (like an "orange peel")
- An unusual pain that won't go away
- Swelling or a lump under the arm

Most changes in the breast are not due to cancer, but it is better to have it checked out as soon as possible by a nurse at the clinic. You may then be referred to a breast clinic for more tests e.g. like a mammogram (breast X-ray) and/or a fine needle biopsy (a sample of the breast tissue is taken for testing).

## About a lump

All breasts have lumpiness that changes with the menstrual cycle. "Suspicious" or worrying lumps are those that are painless, irregular, unchanging or slowly growing, or new. 9 out of 10 lumps are not cancerous.

## Breast Cancer Statistics

Breast cancer is the commonest cancer in women.

In South Africa, 1 in 29 women have the risk of getting breast cancer in their lifetime.

Breast cancer is more common in older women and the majority of women are over 50 years when they are diagnosed.

Breast cancer that is detected early can be treated successfully, and over 80% of women diagnosed with early breast cancer will still be alive in 5 years.

## Risk Factors for Breast Cancer

Older women are at a higher risk of getting breast cancer than younger women.

As well as age, the following factors could also put a woman at a higher risk of getting breast cancer:

- Being overweight
- Drinking alcohol
- Not exercising
- Not having any children and not breast feeding
- Prolonged hormone replacement therapy or combined oral contraceptive.

Only 5% of breast cancers run in families. These breast cancers usually happen at a younger age, so someone that has a close family member that had breast cancer before the age of 40 years, might have higher risk of getting breast cancer.

### **Some of the Myths**

The following things have **NOT** been found to cause breast cancer:

- Using antiperspirant deodorants
- An injury or "love-bite" to the breast
- Drinking milk

### **Some non-profit organisations that provide help for people diagnosed with breast cancer**

#### **Reach-for-Recovery Breast Cancer Support Group**

Visit their website: [www.reach4recovery.org.za](http://www.reach4recovery.org.za) or Tel: 083 306 1941

Mission Statement: "That of one woman giving freely of her time and experience to assist and support another woman with breast cancer."

#### **CANSA**

Visit their website: [www.cansa.org.za](http://www.cansa.org.za)

### **Breast Cancer in Men**

About 1% of all breast cancer occurs in men.

It is often first noticed as a lump in one breast that is not painful.

A man who is older and has a strong family history of female or male breast cancer or ovarian cancer may be at a higher risk of developing breast cancer.