



# QUESTIONS QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ANSWERS

## What Should I Know About Breast Cancer?

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Breast Cancer ranks number two among cancers that cause death in women in the U.S. It is very important to detect Breast Cancer early and to treat it right away. The sooner a woman learns that she has Breast Cancer and gets treated, the better her chance of survival.

How can you find out if you have Breast Cancer?

- First, you need to know if you are at **risk** for Breast Cancer.
- You also need to know the **signs** of Breast Cancer.

No one knows all of the causes of Breast Cancer. This is still being studied. But much is known about many of the risks.

**What are the risk factors for Breast Cancer?**

**Personal Health History:** Your chances of getting Breast Cancer are increased:

- If you had Breast Cancer in the past.
- If you were treated with chest radiation for another form of cancer.
- With age – the chances of getting Breast Cancer increase every year as a woman gets older.

**Family History:** Some Breast Cancers are inherited. That means that you may carry the genes for Breast Cancer. Your chances of getting Breast Cancer are higher if a close relative, such as a mother, sister or daughter, had Breast Cancer. Women at high risk can get tested to learn if they have these genes. They also can get counseling to help them handle their risks.

**Monthly Period (menstrual) History:** Your chances of getting Breast Cancer are higher if any of these are true for you:

- You started having your monthly periods before you were 12 years old.
- You reached menopause later than usual – you did not stop having your periods until you were 55 years old or older.
- You never had children.
- You had your first child after you were 30 years old

**Hormone Medication:** Your risk of getting Breast Cancer increases slightly if one of these is true for you.

- You are taking birth control pills. **Your risk drops after you have been off the pills for 10 years.**
- You are taking hormones for menopause. **Your risk drops after you have been off the hormones for five years.**

### **How can I detect Breast Cancer?**

You cannot see or feel anything in the early stages of Breast Cancer. That is why it is so important to get regular mammograms (X-rays of the breasts). Early stages of Breast Cancer will show up on a mammogram. The sooner you get treatment, the better your chances are of surviving.

- **Women between the ages of 20 and 39 should have a mammogram once every three years.**
- **Women over 40 should have a mammogram every year.**

There are things you can do to detect Breast Cancer. You can check yourself with a Breast Self Exam (BSE). You will be looking and feeling for the following:

- A lump
- A thickening
- A swelling
- Tenderness in the breast or under the arm
- A change in the size or shape of the breast
- Red or scaly skin on the breast or nipple
- Dimpling of the breast (skin looks like an orange peel)
- Pain in the nipple
- Fluid from the nipple for no reason
- A nipple that is suddenly pulled back into the breast
- Very enlarged glands under the arm

## **How do I perform a Breast Self Exam (BSE)?**

Your doctor or nurse can show you how to do a BSE. Once you have learned, you can use this list to remind you how to do it.

- Lie down.
- Put a pillow under your right shoulder.
- Put your right arm behind your head.
- Use the pads on the three middle fingers of your left hand to feel for lumps.
- Press firmly against the breast. Use a circular motion. Work your fingers around the entire breast.
- Then, press your fingers against the breast using an up and down motion.
- Do the same exam on your left breast. Switch your pillow under your left shoulder. Use your right hand to feel for lumps.

Do the same exam on each breast while standing up. Standing makes it easier to feel the upper and outer parts of the breasts near your arm pits. This is where about half of Breast Cancers begin. You can do this exam while standing in the shower. Soap makes your hands move easily. You can feel changes in the breast more easily, too.

This is how to do the exam standing up.

- Place your right arm behind your head while you feel your right breast with your left fingers.
- Then repeat this exam on the left side.
- Stand in front of a mirror. Look at your naked breasts. Look for any skin changes, such as dimpling or swelling.
- Do this exam once a month.
- Do this exam one week after your period so your breasts are less likely to be tender or swollen.
- If you do not have a regular period, do your exam on the same day of each month.

## **What can be done to improve breast health?**

- Women who have one alcoholic drink a day increase their risk for Breast Cancer. If you drink alcohol, cut back.
- Follow a healthy diet. Gaining weight after menopause increases your risk of getting Breast Cancer. Eat foods low in fat and high in fiber. Fruits and vegetables are good choices.
- Stay active. Exercise on a regular basis.

**How can I find a Doctor?**

St. Vincent Charity Hospital has doctors who have special training in the treatment of Breast Cancer. To contact one of our doctors, please call:

**Physician Referral Line** at 1.800.223.8662

Visit our Web site at [www.stvincentcharity.com](http://www.stvincentcharity.com)

**St. Vincent Charity Hospital**

2351 East 22<sup>nd</sup> Street

Cleveland, Ohio 44115

216.861.6200

TTY: Ohio Relay 1.800.750.0750

**Saint Luke's HealthCare Center**

11201 Shaker Boulevard

Cleveland, Ohio 44104

216.721.6900

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