

Circle Of LifeSM: Cancer Education and Wellness for American Indian and Alaska Native Communities



American Cancer Society Circle Of LifeSM
Cancer Education and Wellness for American Indian and Alaska Native Communities

Wellness Along the Cancer Journey:
Cancer Types
Revised October 2015
Chapter 2: Breast Cancer



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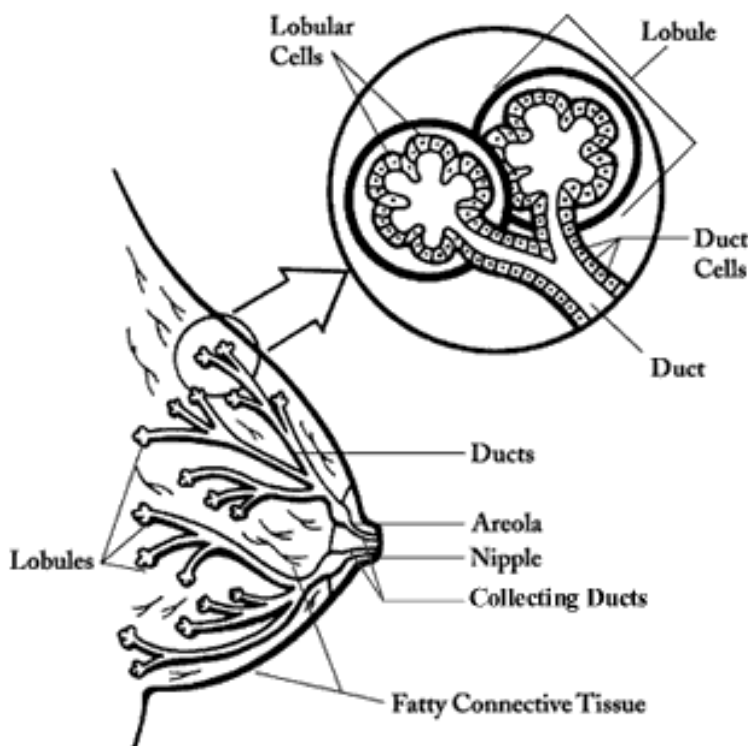
Breast Cancer

Group Discussion		True	False	Not Sure
1.	Breast cancer is not common in American Indian and Alaska Native Women.			
2.	Two out of three women with breast cancer are age 55 or older.			
3.	Men can get breast cancer too.			

Breast cancer is the leading type of cancer among American Indian and Alaska Native women. Breast cancer is most common in women 50 years and older, but younger women can get it too. It is important to learn about breast cancer and its risk factors, to get regular cancer screening, and to adopt traditionally healthy ways of eating and exercising.

A woman's breast is made up of different kinds of tissue. There are glands called lobules that make breast milk. The lobules feed into ducts, small tubes that carry milk from the lobules to the nipple. The breast also contains fat, connective tissue, blood vessels, and lymph vessels. Most breast cancers start in the cells that line the ducts (ductal cancer). Some begin in the lobules (lobular cancer), and a small number start in other tissues of the breast.

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Breast cancer is found mostly in women, but men can get breast cancer, too. Here we will only talk about breast cancer in women, which is far more common. In order to understand breast cancer, it helps to know some basics about the normal parts of the breasts, as shown in the picture.

The Lymph System

The lymph system is important because it is one of the ways in which breast cancers can spread. This system has several parts. The lymph system is made up of nodes and tube-like vessels. The nodes are groups of cells that fight disease, and the vessels carry lymph fluid out of the breast to the nodes. (Lymph fluid is a clear liquid that contains white blood cells, which help fight infections.) Breast cancer cells can enter lymphatic vessels and start to grow in lymph nodes.

Most lymph vessels in the breast lead to lymph nodes under the arm. These are called axillary nodes. If breast cancer cells reach the underarm lymph nodes and grow there, they cause the nodes to swell. It is important to know whether cancer cells have spread to lymph nodes. If they have, there is a higher chance that the cancer cells have also spread to other places in the body. This could affect the treatment plan.

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Types of Breast Cancers

There are many types of breast cancer, though some of them are very rare. We will talk about the most common types here.

Ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS, also known as intraductal carcinoma) is really a pre-cancer. DCIS is only in the ducts and has not spread into the breast tissue. It is one of the non-invasive breast cancers. But some cases can go on and become invasive cancers. There is no way to know for sure which ones will go on to become invasive and which ones won't.

The most common type of breast cancer that has spread beyond where it started is invasive (or infiltrating) ductal carcinoma (IDC). The cancer starts in the duct and invades the tissue of the breast. IDC accounts for about 8 out of 10 invasive breast cancers.

A less common type of breast cancer is invasive (or infiltrating) lobular carcinoma (ILC). ILC starts in the milk glands and can spread to other parts of the body. About 1 in 10 invasive breast cancers is an ILC.

A third type of breast cancer, accounting for only about 1%-3% of breast cancers is inflammatory breast cancer (IBC). Usually there is no single lump or tumor, but the breast will look red and feel warm. The skin may (but not always) have a thick, pitted appearance like an orange peel. The breast may get larger or firmer, tender, or itchy.

In its early stages, inflammatory breast cancer is often mistaken for infection. If the symptoms are caused by cancer, the redness will not improve with antibiotics. Because there is no lump, it may not show up on a mammogram, but signs of IBC can be seen because of the skin changes, either by a health care provider or by the woman. IBC is invasive and aggressive. It grows and spreads quickly.

Breast Lumps

Most breast lumps are benign. This means they are not cancer. Benign breast tumors are abnormal growths, but they do not spread outside of the breast and they do not threaten life. But some benign breast lumps are linked to a higher risk of getting breast cancer.

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Most lumps are caused by fibrocystic changes. Fibrosis is scar-like tissue, and cysts are fluid-filled sacs. These changes can cause breast swelling and pain. They often happen just before a monthly menstrual period is about to start. The breasts may feel lumpy, and sometimes a clear or slightly cloudy fluid comes from the nipple.

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Risk Factors

A risk factor is anything that affects a person’s chance of getting a disease such as cancer. Different cancers have different risk factors. But risk factors don't tell us everything. Many people with one or more risk factors never get cancer, while others with cancer may have had no known risk factors.

Risk Factors Someone Cannot Change	Risk Factors Someone May Be Able to Change
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simply being a woman is the main risk factor for breast cancer. While men also get breast cancer, it is about 100 times more common in women. • The chance of getting breast cancer goes up as a woman gets older. Two out of three women with breast cancer are age 55 or older. • About 5% - 10% of breast cancers are linked to mutations in certain inherited genes. • Breast cancer risk is higher in women who have a mother, sister, or daughter with breast cancer. • A woman who has had cancer in one breast has a greater risk of getting cancer in the other breast or in another part of the same breast. • More glandular tissue and less fat tissue in the breast. Dense breast tissue can also make it harder to detect cancer with a mammogram. • Having menstrual periods that started before age 12 and/or ended after age 55. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being overweight or obese after menopause. • Use of hormone replacement therapy after menopause. • Lack of physical activity. • Having more than one alcoholic drink per day. • Recent use of birth control pills or Depo-Provera shots. • Being overweight or obese after menopause • Recent use of combined hormone therapy after menopause. • Never having children or having one’s first child after age 30.

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Early Detection

For women 45 and older who are at average risk of breast cancer, the best way to find cancer early is to get a mammogram each year. Women age 55 and older can switch to having mammograms every 2 years, or continue yearly screening. For women at high risk for breast cancer, the American Cancer Society recommends screening each year using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). This must be done yearly along with mammograms. Women at high risk are those whose lifetime risk of breast cancer is thought to be 20% or greater. This risk estimate is based on factors like changes in the breast cancer genes (BRCA1 and BRCA2), breast cancer or ovarian cancer in the family, and past radiation treatment to the chest (such as for Hodgkin disease).

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Activity

On the picture below, find the ducts and lobules. Then list one to two risk factors a person may be able to change to try to reduce their risk of breast cancer.



Risk Factors Someone May Be Able to Change:

1. _____
2. _____

See Appendix B to further test your knowledge about breast cancer.

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Story of Hope



"Originally, I found the lump myself, um and I, I learned a very painful way how not to miss mammograms.

I would like to encourage women not to ever miss your mammogram appointment. It is very important. It is very important not to do that no matter what the cost, do it and go for it because my stubbornness cost me my... my breast" --Dorcas Bloom, Siberian Yupik Breast Cancer Survivor

(Clark, R., (Producer) & Bloom, D. (Artist), (2007). *Survivor Video Vignettes: Not Having Mammogram Cost Her Her Breast*. [Web]. Retrieved from http://natamcancer.org/vignettes/dorcasb_2.html)

Key Messages

- Women age 45 to 54 should get mammograms every year.
- Women 55 and older should switch to mammograms every 2 years, or they can continue yearly screening.
- Women between ages 40 to 44 should have the choice to start breast cancer screening with yearly mammograms if they wish to do so.
- All women should know how their breasts normally look and feel and report any changes to their health care provider.
- Most breast lumps are benign (not cancer), but if a woman finds a lump or change in her breast it is important to talk to a health care provider right away.