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# Women's Health: Breast Cancer

According to Breastcancer.org, all women are at risk for breast cancer – research estimates that 1 in 8 women will be diagnosed with invasive breast cancer at some time in their lives. Learn more about the disease, risk factors and prevention tips.

Breast cancer is a disease in which malignant cells form in the tissues of the breast. There are three main types:

- *Ductal carcinoma* – The most common; begins in the cells of the ducts.
- *Lobular carcinoma* – Begins in the lobes and is more often found in both breasts than are other types of breast cancer.
- *Inflammatory breast cancer* – Uncommon type in which the breast is warm, red and swollen.

## Causes and Risk Factors

It is unclear as to what specifically triggers breast cells to grow abnormally. Medical experts attribute the development of breast cancer to a combination of both unknown and known factors including genetics, lifestyle choices and reproductive factors, which may include:

- Older age
- Menstruation at an early age
- Family history
- Having dense breast tissue
- Never having given birth, or having first given birth at an older age
- Having radiation therapy to the breast/chest
- Drinking alcoholic beverages
- Taking hormones

- Being Caucasian or African-American

## Symptoms and Screenings

The most common indication of breast cancer is discovering a lump in the breast or underarm area. Other signs include:

- Swelling
- Skin irritation/dimpling
- Nipple pain/abnormalities
- Redness or scaly skin
- Discharge from the nipple

To detect breast cancer, the following tests and procedures may be used by physicians:

- *Mammogram* – a breast X-ray
- *Biopsy* – the removal of cells or tissues so they can be viewed under a microscope
- *Estrogen and progesterone receptor tests* – to determine the levels of each hormone
- *MRI (magnetic resonance imaging)* – a procedure that uses a magnet, radio waves and a computer to make a series of detailed pictures of inside the body

## Prognosis and Treatment

The chance of recovery and the treatment options depend on many factors, including the stage of cancer, how fast the tumor is growing, hormone receptor levels, and a woman's age and general

health. There are four standard types of treatment used for breast cancer:

- *Surgery*, ranging from a small lump of tissue being removed to an entire breast (mastectomy).
- *Radiation therapy* uses high-energy X-rays to kill cancer cells or to prevent their growth.
- *Chemotherapy* uses drugs to stop the growth of cancer cells.
- *Hormone therapy* removes hormones or blocks their action to keep cancer cells from growing.

## Prevention

It is important to give yourself a monthly breast exam (see box). Other ways to keep breast cancer at bay:

- Limit alcohol and fats
- Stay physically active
- Maintain a healthy weight

Visit [www.breastcancer.org](http://www.breastcancer.org) or [www.komen.org](http://www.komen.org) for more information.



## Did You Know...?

The best way to find breast cancer early is by performing a breast self-exam each month. Start by looking at your breasts in the mirror to see if they look physically different. Next, lie down and use a few fingers in a circular motion to go over each breast. Finally, do the same motion while standing. View the video on [www.komen.org](http://www.komen.org) or the diagram on [www.breastcancer.org](http://www.breastcancer.org) for more assistance.