



Breast Cancer Awareness Month October



Women Breast cancer

What is breast cancer?

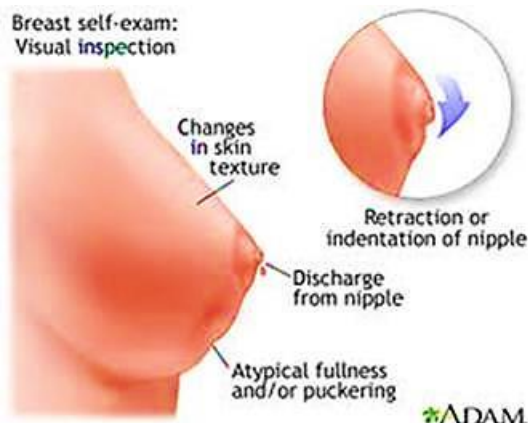
Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women around the world. In developing countries, breast cancer is on the increase and most cases are diagnosed late.

IMPORTANT RISK FACTORS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF BREAST CANCER

- Age – women over the age of 50 years are more likely to develop breast cancer.
- Breast cancer in a first – or second degree relative, (mother, sister, grandmother, aunt)
- Early age of first menstruation, late onset of menopause, late age of first pregnancy.
- The use of oral contraceptives or hormone replacement therapy.
- Alcohol use
- Obesity
- Lack of physical activity

Preventing breast cancer

Many of the risk factors cannot be avoided, but your risk can be reduced by having a healthy diet, exercising moderately, maintain a healthy weight and minimising your alcohol intake.



Symptoms of breast cancer

- Pain in the breasts
- A lump in the breast
- A change in the size or shape of the breast
- Dimpling in the skin of the breast
- Scaly, red or swollen skin on the breast
- A nipple that turns inward
- Fluid (other than breast milk) coming from the nipple, especially if blood.

These are symptoms that may indicate breast cancer. If you have any of these symptoms, visit your doctor for an examination and appropriate investigations to determine if there is cancer or not.

Screening:

Unfortunately, breast cancer may not cause any symptoms initially and a lump may be too small to feel. For this reason, screening for breast cancer is recommended.

A mammogram is an X-ray used to detect abnormal changes in the breast. Women over the age of 40 years should have a mammogram every 2-3 years.

Diagnosis of breast cancer:

If your doctor feels a suspicious lump or there is something abnormal on your mammogram, a biopsy is recommended. A biopsy is a simple procedure whereby a small piece of tissue is taken from the lump or suspicious area and examined by a pathologist at the laboratory to determine if there is cancer.

Testing for hereditary breast cancer

A small percentage of women are at risk for breast cancer because they have a "breast cancer gene". This refers to a mutation or fault in the genes BRCA1 or BRCA2. These women have a strong family history of breast cancer. Tests for BRCA1 and BRCA2 gene mutations are available, but genetic counselling is recommended to determine if tests should be done.