



BREAST CANCER

Breast cancer is a malignant growth that begins in the tissues of the breast. Most women are diagnosed with breast cancer between the ages of 50 and 70. However, it can occur in younger women and all breast masses should be investigated. The earlier breast cancer is diagnosed, the more treatment options there are available, and the greater the chance of long-term survival.

What are the risk factors?

- If you have a family history of breast cancer.
- Women who started menstrual periods early (before age 12) or went through menopause late (after age 55) are at higher risk.
- Drinking 2 or more alcoholic beverages a day.
- A diet high in animal fat.
- Smoking.
- Being overweight.
- Women who have used Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) run a slightly higher risk of getting breast cancer.
- Low physical activity.

Remember – exercise, a low-fat diet and weight control can reduce your risk of breast cancer.

Clinical Breast Examinations

A Clinical Breast Examination (CBE) is a visual and manual examination of the entire breast, from the collarbone to the bra line, and from the armpit to the breastbone. It is advisable to have a CBE as part of your annual medical checkup.

Breast self-examination

When your breasts start to develop, perform a monthly breast self-examination (BSE), at the same time each month, approximately one week after your period. If you no longer menstruate, pick the same day each month.

Follow the simple steps below:

STEP 1:

Stand in front of the mirror, and look carefully for any changes to your breasts, looking at their symmetry, shape and size.

If you see any of the following changes, bring them to your doctor's attention:

- Dimpling, puckering, or bulging of the skin
- A nipple that has changed position or an inverted nipple (pushed inward instead of sticking out)
- Redness, soreness, rash, or swelling.

STEP 2:

Stand with one hand behind your head. With the other hand, gently examine your breast; in a circular motion, feeling for any lumps, thickening or changes (don't forget to check your armpit). Repeat with the other hand. Remember to feel all the parts of each breast with your fingertips.

STEP 3:

Next, feel your breasts while lying down, using your right hand to feel your left breast and then your left hand to feel your right breast. Use a firm, smooth touch with the first few finger pads of your hand, keeping the fingers flat and together. Use a circular motion, about the size of a R5 coin. Cover the entire breast from top to bottom, side to side — from your collarbone to the top of your abdomen, and from your armpit to your cleavage.

Remember: breast self-examination will only take 10 minutes of your time, once a month – and it could save your life!

What do I do if I find a change in my breast/s?

See a Platinum Health medical practitioner as soon as possible. A lump does not mean that you definitely have breast cancer as many lumps are benign (not cancerous), but a doctor must check all lumps to be certain. Today most doctors recommend that you go for a sonar annually, once you have had children, or once you turn 35. When you turn 40, you should have a mammogram each year.

For more information or assistance, consult a Platinum Health healthcare provider at your closest Platinum Health facility.



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