



*Breast
Cancer*



As people rightly say “think before you pink!”. Breast cancer incidence has increased significantly in recent years. It is estimated that one in every eight women has a chance of developing breast cancer. Breast cancer is the most common form of cancer in women & second leading cause of death after lung cancer in women of age group 35 to 54 years. It can also occur in men, though incidence is rare.

1. What are the risk factors in development of breast cancer?

- ⤴ Increased estrogen exposure, either in the form of pills or hormonal imbalance in body.
- ⤴ If some one in the family (blood relatives) has breast cancer.
- ⤴ Long menstrual history (early age for first menstruation & late age of menopause).
- ⤴ Women who has never been pregnant & who has never breast fed a baby.
- ⤴ History of cancer in one breast. History of uterine or ovarian cancer.
- ⤴ History of exposure to radiation.

2. When to suspect Breast Cancer?

If a woman experiences any of the following:-

- ⤴ Lump or mass in the breast.
- ⤴ Change in symmetry or size of breast.
- ⤴ Change in skin such as thickening or dimpling, scaling around nipple, an orange peel like appearance or ulcers.
- ⤴ Change in skin temperature or color.
- ⤴ Abnormal/blood discharge from nipple.
- ⤴ Changes in nipple like itching, burning, erosion or retraction.
- ⤴ In advanced stages –swelling of arm or bone pains due to distant metastases.

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3. What is Breast self examination?

Promotion of self breast examination & regular clinical checkup are the best ways of diagnosing breast cancer in early stages.

1) Breast self examination (BSE)

The best time to perform BSE is 1 week after the menstrual period ends. If periods are regular a lady can fix a date & can examine her breasts every month.

Steps of BSE



i) Stand before a mirror and compare both breasts noticing the shape & size in standing as well as leaning forward position. It is not usual for one breast to be larger than other. Check for any unusual signs around nipple such as puckering, dimpling, retraction, scaling, change in size or shape. Look for the same thing in different arm positions.

ii) Raise your left arm. Using pads of 3 fingers of right hand feel the left breast firmly, carefully & slowly. Begin at outer edge. Press in small circles and move slowly around the breast. Also examine under armpit & collar bone.

iii) Gently squeeze the nipple & check for any discharge.

iv) Repeat steps 2 & 3 for right breast examining from left hand.

v) Repeat steps 2 & 3 on lying down position. Lie flat on your back with arm over your head & a pillow or folded towel under the shoulder of the breast that you are going to examine. This position flattens the breast & makes it easier to check.

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6. How do you screen for Breast Cancer?

Regular check up is required for early diagnosis. It involves a thorough clinical examination & routine mammography. Mammogram means X – ray of the breast. It detects tumors that are very small often too small to be detected by breast self examination. Every woman should have an initial mammogram between ages 35 & 39. Woman in age group 40 to 49 years should have it once in every one to two years. And woman over age of 50 or who have family history of breast cancer should have it every year.

7. How to confirm the diagnosis?

Diagnosis is confirmed by FNAC (Fine Needle Aspiration Cytology) or by histological examination of the surgically excised tumor. In FNAC, a needle is inserted into the mass / lump, tissue is aspirated, scraped on a glass slide and sent for pathological evaluation. If the tumor is very small, surgical excision (lumpectomy) is done & the specimen is sent for biopsy.



8. What investigations are required for assessment of staging and nature of tumor?

- i. Chest X – Ray
- ii. CT – Scan of chest: - to know the extent of disease.
- iii. CT – Scan Brain / MRI Brain
- iv. Bone scan to evaluate for any spread of the tumor in bones.
- v. PET- CT – Scan.
- vi. Hormone receptor studies on breast tissue specimen like ER (estrogen receptor), PR (progesterone receptors) and Her 2 neu.

9. What are the treatment options available?

If diagnosed in early stages, breast cancer is one of the curable cancers. It requires multimodality treatment & a combination of surgery, radiotherapy & chemotherapy as per the stage of the disease.

10. Is Breast Cancer curable?

Breast cancer is one of the cancers declared as curable cancer. If this disease is diagnosed in Stage I, 90 – 95 % of these cancers are completely curable. Hence, early diagnosis is paramount for the success.

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