



## UNDERSTANDING BREAST CANCER

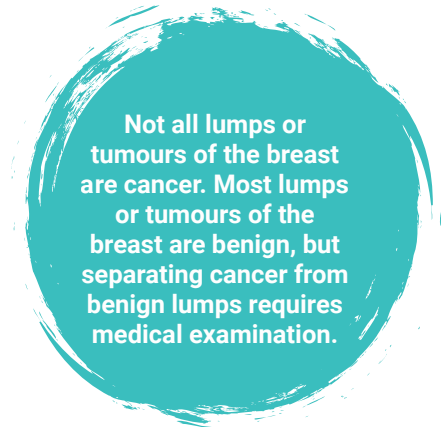
# NEWSLETTER

Source: Lancet Laboratories SA

Breast cancer is a malignant tumour that develops in the breast and can spread to other parts of the body. Other names for breast cancer include breast carcinoma, mammary carcinoma, or cancer, or the scientific name of the specific cancer, for example, duct carcinoma.

### Why is **breast cancer dangerous**?

Breast cancer starts in the breast but can spread to other parts of the body under certain circumstances. When cancer spreads, it can cause destruction of the organs that it spreads to and illness due to a burden on the body's resources, like the immune system. **Cancer is generally more difficult to treat when it has spread to other parts of the body.**



Not all lumps or tumours of the breast are cancer. Most lumps or tumours of the breast are benign, but separating cancer from benign lumps requires medical examination.

### Who is at **risk** of **getting breast cancer**?

Breast cancer is more common in women, but men can also get breast cancer. **A family history of breast cancer is a strong risk factor**; the closer the relative, the higher the risk. Breast cancer is more common in older age groups, with the number of cases rising after **50 years of age**. Young women can also get breast cancer; being **younger than 40** does not exclude them from **getting breast cancer**.

### How do you screen for **breast cancer**?

**Self-examination:** finding a lump in the breast, nipple discharge outside of pregnancy, puckering of the skin, or nipple retraction. Examination by a healthcare worker. **Mammograms:** **This is a special type of X-ray of the breast that can detect cancers. If there is suspicion of cancer, the area will be sampled with a biopsy to confirm the diagnosis.**

## When **should I start screening for breast cancer?**

- Self-examination should be done as a routine from an early age.
- Screening with mammography should ideally begin with a baseline study in the **late thirties** and according to individual risk **(to be discussed with your health care provider)**.



## How is **breast cancer treated?**

Treatment may include all or a combination of the **following types of treatment:**

- **Surgery** to cut out the breast cancer (the whole breast does not necessarily get removed).
- **Chemotherapy** is used to kill the cancer cells in cases where there is risk of spread.
- **Hormonal therapy** to slow down cancer growth.
- **Radiotherapy** in cases that require it.



## How long will I live if **I get breast cancer ?**

Every breast cancer is different, and every individual who suffers from breast cancer is different. The long-term outcome for any individual with breast cancer will **depend on the aggressiveness of the cancer**, the amount of spread to glands and other sites, the response of the cancer to treatment, and the fitness of the individual. Most **breast cancers** are cared for or managed well for many years with **appropriate therapy** and the key to long-term health is in early detection of the cancer.

Can  
breast  
cancer  
be cured ?

Yes, it depends on the type of tumour and its stage. The key factors are early detection and diagnosis of the cancer. Appropriate treatment by the team of health professionals.

**Key points to remember: Breast cancer is best treated when small/early stage;** To find small breast cancers requires active surveillance by the individual, the health care provider, and using technology in the form of mammograms; **Contact your health care provider** to form a plan for ongoing breast health and screening.