

Problems of the Breasts

Breast lumps

Breast lumps are very common in most women, especially soft, fluid-filled ones (called cysts). These usually change during a woman's monthly cycle, and sometimes feel sore or painful when pressed. **Few breast lumps are cancer.** But since breast cancer is always a possibility, a woman should try to examine her breasts for lumps once a month (see 'warning signs' below).



Discharge from the nipple

Milky or clear discharge from one or both nipples is usually normal if a woman has breastfed a baby within the last year. Brown, green, or bloody discharge—especially from only one nipple—could be a sign of cancer. Get checked by a health worker who can examine your breasts.



Breast infection

If a woman is breastfeeding a baby and gets a hot, red sore area on the breast, she probably has *mastitis*, or an *abscess*. This is not cancer and is easily cured. If the woman is not breastfeeding, it may be a sign of cancer.

Cancer of the breast

Breast cancer usually grows slowly. If it is found early, it can sometimes be cured. It is hard to tell who will get breast cancer. The risk might be greater for a woman whose mother or sisters have had breast cancer, or for a woman who has had cancer of the womb. Breast cancer is more common in women over age 50.

Warning signs:

- a hard painless lump with a jagged shape, that is in only one breast and does not move under the skin
- redness, or a sore on the breast that does not heal
- skin on the breast that is pulled in, or looks rough and pitted, like orange or lemon peel
- a nipple that changes and becomes pulled inward



lump

- abnormal discharge from a nipple
- a painless swelling under the arm that does not go away
- pain in the breast that does not go away after 4 to 6 weeks For any of these signs, see a trained health worker right away

If there is one or more of these signs, get help from a trained health worker right away.

Finding and treating breast cancer

If you examine your breasts regularly, you are likely to notice if there are any changes or if a new lump develops. A special X-ray called a mammogram can find a breast lump when it is very small and less dangerous. But mammograms are not available in many places, and they are very expensive. And it cannot tell for sure if a lump is cancer.

The only way to know for sure that a woman has breast cancer is with a biopsy. For this, a surgeon removes all or part of the lump with a needle or a knife and has it tested for cancer in a laboratory.

Treatment depends on how advanced the cancer is and what is available where you live. If a lump is small and found early, just removing the lump may be effective. But for some cases of breast cancer, an operation may be needed to remove the whole breast. Sometimes doctors also use medicines and radiation therapy.

No one knows yet how to prevent breast cancer. But we do know that finding and treating breast cancer early makes a cure more likely. For some women it never comes back. In other women, the cancer may come back years later. It may come back in the other breast or, less often, in other parts of the body.

See a health worker right away if you have already had breast cancer and find another lump in the breast or notice other warning signs of cancer.

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