

Cancer is the name for a number of different diseases that have one thing in common—the body's cells behave abnormally. Cells begin to multiply without any order or control and do not die. Cancer can occur in any part of the body.

What is breast cancer?

Breast cancer is the diagnosis when cells identified as breast tissue begin to behave abnormally as described above. In men it usually develops in the small amount of breast tissue behind the nipple.

Breast cancer in men

Breast cancer is 100 times more likely to be diagnosed in a woman than in a man. Men have comparatively small amounts of breast tissue compared to women. As a result it is sometimes easier to detect a mass in a man than it is in a woman. However, because men have less breast tissue than women, breast cancer often metastasizes (spreads) to other tissues and organs more quickly in men. Breast cancer in men are often smaller than those detected in women but are also more likely to be diagnosed at a more advanced stage in a man compared to a woman. Because the male breast is smaller than the female breast all breast cancers start close to the nipple.

Can a man have non-cancerous breast disease?

Gynecomastia is the most common non-cancerous male breast disorder and is an increase in the amount of a man's breast tissue. When a man has this condition he may notice a button-like or disc-like growth under his nipple and areola. It is usually diagnosed in teenage boys and older men because of hormonal changes.

What is a risk factor?

A risk factor is anything that increases your chance of getting a disease. Having risk factors does not mean you will get a disease. An absence of risk factors does not mean that you will not develop a disease.

What are the risk factors for male breast cancer?

Aging - Most men diagnosed with breast are 65 or older at the time of diagnosis.

Family history of breast cancer - A man's risk is greater if other members of his family, especially a parent (father or mother), sibling (sister or brother) or child (son or daughter) has had breast cancer.

Genetics - Having a gene known as the BRCA2 may increase a man's risk of breast cancer. The BRCA1 and CHEK2 genes may also be responsible for some cases of breast cancer in men.

Klinefelter Syndrome - this is a medical condition that is present from birth. Men with this condition, essentially have less levels of males hormones and higher levels of female hormones in comparison to other men.

Radiation exposure - If a man's chest has been exposed to radiation e.g. such as the type used to treat another type of cancer, he may be at increased risk of developing breast cancer.

Alcohol - Men who drink alcoholic beverages are at increased risk.

Liver disease - The liver plays an important role in hormone metabolism. Men with severe liver disease such as cirrhosis have relatively low levels of male hormones and higher levels of female hormones such as estrogen.

Obesity - Men who are obese have higher levels of female hormones. This is because fat cells convert male hormones into female hormones such as estrogen.

What is a protective factor?

A protective factor is any thing that may reduce your risk of developing a disease. Protective factors do not guarantee that you will not develop a disease.

What are protective factors against male breast cancer?

Men can lower their risk of breast cancer by maintaining an ideal body weight. One way to achieve this is by leading a physically active lifestyle and avoiding a diet high in fats and sugary foods and avoiding oversized food portions. Men can also reduce their risk by avoiding alcohol.

Can men be screened for breast cancer?

Women can be screened for breast cancer through a regimen of breast self-exam, clinical breast exam and mammograms. There is NO recommended and effective screening test for male breast cancer.

Men are advised to observe and feel their breasts and report any changes in the color, size, shape or texture of the nipple, areola and surrounding breast tissue to their doctor.

What are some of the most common signs and symptoms of male breast cancer?

Some signs and symptoms of breast cancer that men should be aware of are:

- A lump or swelling of the breast and surrounding tissue.
- Skin dimpling or puckering of the tissue around the breast.
- Nipple retraction i.e. pointing inwards.
- Redness or scaling of the nipple or breast skin.
- Discharge from the nipple.

How is breast cancer diagnosed in men?

There are a number of steps in the diagnostic procedure including :

- Clinical breast exam - A doctor will examine the breasts and surrounding tissue.
- Diagnostic mammogram - A special x-ray of the breast is performed. Just as in women, the breast is compressed between two “plates” and multiple views of the breasts are taken.
- Ultrasound – An imaging technique using harmless, high frequency sound waves to form an image of the breast tissue.
- Biopsy - There are different types of biopsy but in all cases a sample of breast tissue is collected and sent to the lab for examination by a pathologist.

This information has been adapted from information provided by the American Cancer Society.

How to become involved

The Cayman Islands Cancer Society is an independent non-profit organization. It provides a number of programs and services including cancer awareness and prevention programs, screening, and financial and other assistance to cancer patients. You can support the society by becoming a member, making a donation, donating goods and services or volunteering your time.

Contact us

For more information on male breast cancer or the Cayman Islands Cancer Society, please contact us.

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male breast cancer

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