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Breast Cancer: Myth vs. Fact

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BREAST CANCER: Myth vs. Fact

Unless people experience breast cancer in their own lives, or they're close to someone who does, they might not be able to separate myth from fact when it comes to this disease. While breast cancer is one of the better-known and more-talked-about cancers, there are still many misconceptions out there.

MYTH: *If you don't have a family history of breast cancer, you won't get it.*

FACT: Most people diagnosed with breast cancer have no known family history.

ONLY about 5-10% of breast cancers are believed to be hereditary.



That means the vast majority of people who get breast cancer have no family history, suggesting that other factors must be at work, such as environment and lifestyle. Still, if you have a strong family history of breast cancer on either your mother's or your father's side, this is an important risk factor that should be taken seriously.

MYTH: *If you maintain a healthy weight, exercise regularly, eat healthy, and limit alcohol, you don't have to worry about breast cancer.*

FACT: Although these behaviors can help lower breast cancer risk, they can't eliminate it.

It is important to get regular screenings, perform breast self-exams, and pay attention to any unusual changes in your breasts. No one is 100% safe.

MYTH: *Annual mammograms guarantee that breast cancer will be found early.*

FACT: Although mammography is the best early-detection tool we have, it doesn't always find breast cancer at an early stage. It can return a false-negative result, meaning that the images look normal even though cancer is present.



It is estimated that mammograms miss about 20% of breast cancers at the time of screening.

Mammography does catch most breast cancers, though, and that's why regular screenings are essential. It's also important to pay attention

to any changes in your breasts, perform monthly breast self-exams, and have a physical examination of your breasts by a healthcare professional every year.

MYTH: *Breast cancer always causes a lump you can feel.*

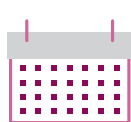
FACT: Breast cancer might not cause a lump, especially when it first develops. By the time it does cause a lump, the cancer might have already moved beyond the breast into the lymph nodes.

Other myths: "If the lump is painful, it isn't breast cancer," and "If you can feel a lump that is smooth, and/or that moves around freely under the skin, it's not breast cancer." Fact: Any lump or unusual mass that can be felt through the skin needs to be checked out by a healthcare professional.

MYTH: *Early-stage breast cancer rarely reoccurs.*

FACT: Even with early-stage breast cancer, there is always some risk the cancer will return.

Another myth: If the breast cancer doesn't come back within 5 years, it will never come back. While it's true that the risk of recurrence is greatest in the first 2 to 5 years, later recurrences can happen.



Even at 20 YEARS after diagnosis, people with stage 1, low-risk hormone receptor-positive breast cancer have a 15-20% chance of recurrence.

MYTH: *All breast cancer is treated the same way.*

FACT: Treatment plans vary widely depending on the characteristics of the cancer and patient preferences. Each person's treatment plan is tailored to his or her needs.

MYTH: *Breast cancer only happens to middle-aged and older women.*

FACT: Younger women can and do get breast cancer, as do men. Being female and growing older are the main risk factors for developing breast cancer, but women of all ages need to report any unusual changes to their doctors. In 2017, about 4% of invasive breast cancers were diagnosed in women under the age of 40, while about 23% were diagnosed in women in their 50s and 27% in women ages 60 to 69.



ONE in EVERY 25 invasive breast cancer cases occurred in women UNDER 40.

Breast cancer is even rarer in men, but it does happen. Male breast cancer accounts for less than 1% of all breast cancers diagnosed in the U.S. In 2019, about 2,670 men are expected to be diagnosed with the disease.

MYTH: *When treatment is over, you're finished with breast cancer.*

FACT: Breast cancer can have a long-term impact on people's lives and well-being. Targeted therapies may be prescribed for a year or more. Hormonal therapies are often prescribed for up to 10 years. If a woman has decided to have her breasts reconstructed, this may require a series of surgeries over several months. And for those with metastatic or stage IV breast cancer, treatment may last for the rest of their lives.

Even after main treatments are done, people can experience long-term side effects. Some of these side effects can be physical and others may be mental or emotional.

Source: breastcancer.org