

# Breast Cancer

Breast cancer is the second-deadliest cancer among American women (after lung cancer), and the incidence and death rates of breast cancer increase with age. Early detection with regular mammograms remains the single most effective way for combating the disease. When detected early before it spreads, women have a 98 percent survival rate after five years. Progress in both earlier detection and improved treatments are resulting in higher survival rates, which have been steadily increasing since 1990. Among women younger than 50, rates have improved by 3.3 percent per year and in those 50 and older by 2 percent each year.

## Statistics

- In the United States, one in eight women will be diagnosed with invasive breast cancer during her lifetime.
- During 2008, 182,460 new cases of breast cancer in women and 1,990 cases of breast cancer in men are expected to be diagnosed in the United States.
- In 2008, 40,480 women and 450 men are expected to die from breast cancer in the United States.
- Nationally, mammography rates in women 40 and older decreased from 70.1 percent in 2000 to 66.4 percent in 2005.
- In Texas, breast cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed among women.

## Risk Factors

- **Age:** Age is the most important factor affecting breast cancer risk. Most cases of breast cancer occur in women over 60.
- **Race:** Breast cancer is the most common cancer and is the second-leading cause of cancer death among African-American women. Breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in Hispanic women.
- **Family History:** Women with immediate family members (grandmother, mother, or sister) who have had breast cancer are at a greater risk of developing the disease. If you have a family history of cancer, genetic testing may point to preventative measures.
- **Diet:** Overweight women have a higher risk of developing breast cancer.

## Symptoms

The signs for breast cancer are not the same for all women. In fact, some women show no signs at all. If any of the following symptoms or signs are present, women are encouraged to consult their physician immediately for proper testing:

- Change in breast size or shape
- A lump or thickening in the breast
- Swelling, warmth, redness, or darkening of the breast
- New pain in one spot
- Dimpling or puckering of the skin
- Itchy, scaly sore, or rash on the nipple
- A lump under the arm
- Pulling in of the nipple or other parts of the breast
- Nipple discharge that starts suddenly

## Prevention

Evidence indicates the combination of early detection and improvements in treatment have resulted in increasing survival rates.

- Screening
  - Self-Exams: Women should begin to administer breast self-exams in their 20s. Any changes in their breasts should be reported to a doctor immediately.
  - Clinical Breast Exams: Women in their 20s and 30s should have a clinical breast exam every three years, and women over the age of 40 should have annual mammograms. Mammograms can detect breast cancer at an early stage when treatment may be more effective and more treatment options are available. Mammography detects about 80 to 90 percent of breast cancers in women without symptoms.
- Lifestyle
  - Regular exercise may decrease the risk of breast cancer. Exercise reduces estrogen levels, fights obesity, lowers insulin levels, and boosts the function of immune system cells that attack tumors.
  - Limit your consumption of alcohol. Studies show that high levels of alcohol can increase the risk of breast cancer.
  - Since obesity can further complicate breast cancer, maintain a healthy body weight.
- Higher Risk
  - Women and men who are BRCA-positive should discuss preventive mastectomy, and women who are BRCA-positive should discuss drug/hormone therapies with their physicians as options that may reduce breast cancer risk.

## Treatment Options

Anyone with breast cancer should consult with a medical oncologist to determine their specific treatment needs. There are two main types of breast cancer treatment: local and systemic. Surgery and radiation therapy are local treatments. Chemotherapy and hormone therapy are systemic therapies. Local and systemic treatments are often used together to provide the best chance of disease control.

*Sources: American Cancer Society, National Cancer Institute, Susan G. Komen for the Cure, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Texas Department of State Health Services*