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BEWARE OF THE CRAB IN YOUR BREAST

What you Need to Know about Breast Cancer!



PREPARED BY
FORUM FOR BREAST PROTECTION

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About Forum for Breast Cancer Protection



The aim and objective of the organization is to Increase awareness towards Breast Cancer among women in India. They do this through public education lectures in schools, colleges, corporate and public institutions. They widely screen accessible video to breast self-exam. Wide circulation of information booklets, pamphlets in hospitals and other public places including educational institutions, corporate offices, railways stations & airports.

Website - <http://forumforbreastcancerprotection.org/>

Breast Cancer – How Common is it?

Breast Cancer is the commonest cancer in urban women in India, and today its incidence exceeds that of cancer of the uterine cervix. Fortunately Breast Cancer is one of the few common cancers where early detection is possible, i.e. detection at a stage when there is a high probability of cure.

Every year, 100,000 women are detected with Breast Cancer in India. This translates into the fact that 1 in 28 Indian women are likely to get this tumour every year, as compared to 1 in 7 in the western countries. The future prediction is that with industrialization and lifestyle changes, the incidence in India is going to be close to the western figures. At today cure rate of the 15-20 detected breast cancer 5-10 will die almost entirely because of late detection and advance stage of the disease when first run by the doctor. This problem of increasing incidence in our country is compounded by the very high incidence of advanced incurable stage of the disease. Clearly this points to the need for simple measures which lead to early detection in a curable stage of the disease.

The fact that early detection of breast cancer saves lives is established. Detection in stage I has almost a 90 % chance of cure, while detection in stage III has 0% chance of cure. The cure rates in the western world have improved entirely because of generation of mass awareness leading to early detection and treatment. Early detection is of course helped by improvements in imaging, and the regular examination of women by trained doctors and by mammography. However since the process starts with the women herself. The most important vehicle for this process is awareness of the disease.

Breast Cancer awareness assumes importance for 2 reasons. Firstly women today play important roles in the society, and the incidence of cancer will impose a severe psychological and physical barrier on their activities. Secondly, it is not possible to answer the question “what causes breast cancer and how can it be prevented”. Although there is an ever increasing knowledge on the risk factors, there are only a few of these like diet and physical activity that can be changed. And they only play a minor part. So our weapon to combat breast cancer remains to empower women to help early detection and seek early treatment. There is thus a need to change the scene from accidental discovery of breast lumps, as it happens universally today in our society, to lumps discovered by regular periodic self-examination and screening tests.



Risk Factors for Breast Cancer

Harmonal Influences and Breast Cancer

Breast cancer is prone to occur in women who have a longer exposure to ovarian hormone in their lifetime.

- Thus women who have an early onset of periods (menarche) and a delayed menopause have this as a risk factor.
- Pregnancies and Breast Feeding interrupt oestrogen production and thus have a beneficial action. Breast Feeding for over 6 months to a year is a good habit, but multiple pregnancies in today's scenario are unfortunately looked down upon.
- Use of contraceptive pills for over 10 years as a means of birth control in women under 35 years is a risk factor. The pills augment the availability of oestrogen to target the cells in the breast to mutate into "crabs". Women who discontinue the pill however, cease to have this as risk factor ten years after discontinuing the pill.
- Use of oestrogen replacement therapy in post menopausal women for over 5 years increases the risk.

Lifestyle and Breast Cancer

- Obesity is a risk factor, and thus a low fat diet with fruits and vegetables is beneficial.
- Over indulgence in alcohol is a risk factor, and a limited healthy intake of about 2 drinks a week is healthy for more than one reason. Smoking also increases the risk.
- It has been documented that women who exercise for four hours per week reduce their risk of breast cancer.
- Having said all the above, it is true that most women with breast cancer do not have a risk factor.

Heredity as a Risk Factor

- There is strong relationship between the incidence of breast cancer in women who have had this condition in their first degree relatives. Thus the daughter / sister of breast cancer patient has a higher risk.



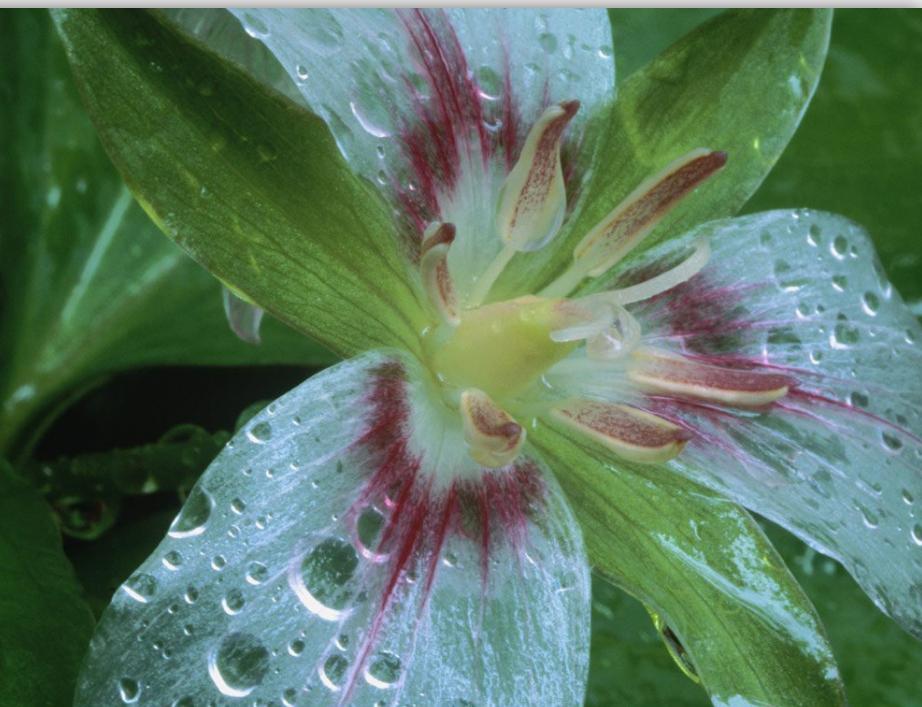
- In certain women, there may be a mutation of a gene (BRCA-1 & BRCA-2). However testing for this gene mutation would only be advisable if several members of a family get the disease. In the presence of this mutation, these women should be kept under very close surveillance and may at some stage have their breasts removed and replaced by an implant.
- However to put the record straight, most patients with breast cancer or their first degree relatives do not have mutation of this gene.

Myths associated with Breast Cancer

- Wearing a bra or an under wired bra does not cause breast cancer
- Judiciously done screening mammograms do not increase the risk of breast cancer.
- Breast cancer is not contagious and cannot be transmitted from one woman to another like tuberculosis.
- An injury to the breast does not cause cancer. It may at best draw attention to a pre-existing lump.
- Antiperspirants and deodorants do not cause breast cancer.

Less Know Facts about Breast Cancer

- Breast cancer may rarely also occur in men
- Although the sixth and seventh decades have the highest incidence, it may occur in younger women.
- Most breast cancers in India present as breast lumps. However the reverse is not true. That is not all breast lumps are cancer, and in fact 80% of breast lumps are benign.
- The important fact to remember is that breast cancers diagnosed early have an over 80% chance of cure. Thus all efforts have to be made for an early diagnosis.



Measures for Early Detection

Besides improvement in therapy, the foremost measure that has improved results in the management of this disease is early diagnosis. In countries where the screening programmes are widely practiced, this has become the commonest means to identify a cancer in the breast at an early stage. This has been one of the major causes of the high cure rates achieved. There are three screening techniques to detect Breast Cancer:

- a) **Periodic Breast Self Examination over the age of 20**
- b) **Annual Mammography after of the age of 50 unless there are other risk factors**
- c) **Annual Clinical Breast Tissue Examination**

Breast Self-Examination

The most common presentation of Breast Cancer is a lump in the breast, and the women must be taught how to feel for a lump in their breast. This should be as much a part of their self-care as a pedicure, hair-dressing or a facial. Breast self Examination (BSE) as the name suggests is examination of ones own breasts. This involves detecting lumps, changes in skin or nipple, and presence of nipple discharge. This should be learned and regularly practiced once a month, a week after the periods. A video the describes the proper technique of Breast Self-Examination (which includes looking or inspecting your breast and feeling your breast) can be seen at www.indusladies.com/byebyebreastcancer.

As the film would show, this practice will lead to detection of changes much earlier. The Film also seeks to enforce the need to seek medical advice as soon as changes are detected. Breast self examination can be carried out in the calm ambience of ones home at ones convenience. However every woman has to learn how to do this properly and correctly.

The video teaches the lay women how to conduct a breast self examination. It shows an Indian women carrying out a breast self examination and serves as a guide to a step-by-step process.

Annual Mammography

Mammography is a soft tissue x-ray of the the breast done on a dedicated mammographic machine. It can differentiate between normal tissue, cancerous tissue and other non-cancerous growth. Young women less than 40 have dense breast because of functioning ovaries and hence mammography can miss cancerous growth. Yearly mammography is

the only screening procedure that is shown to reduce breast cancer mortality by 30% in various international studies. Current guidance is for women over 50 with normal risk factors to do a yearly Mammogram. Women between 40 and 50 with risk factors should consult a doctor.

Annual Clinical Breast Tissue Examination

Clinical breast examination is a dedicated examination of the breast by doctors experienced in Breast Diseases. This involves both looking and feeling of both the breast and underarm by the doctor. This should be done after the age of 30. Clinical breast examination can pickup cancers missed by mammography or by breast self-exam.

Warning Signs

As discussed above, the most common presentation of Breast Cancer is the development of a lump in the breast. During your regular Breast Self-Exam, if you suspect a lump, visit a doctor immediately. The below are also warnings signs. If any of the below happen to you, please see a doctor immediately.

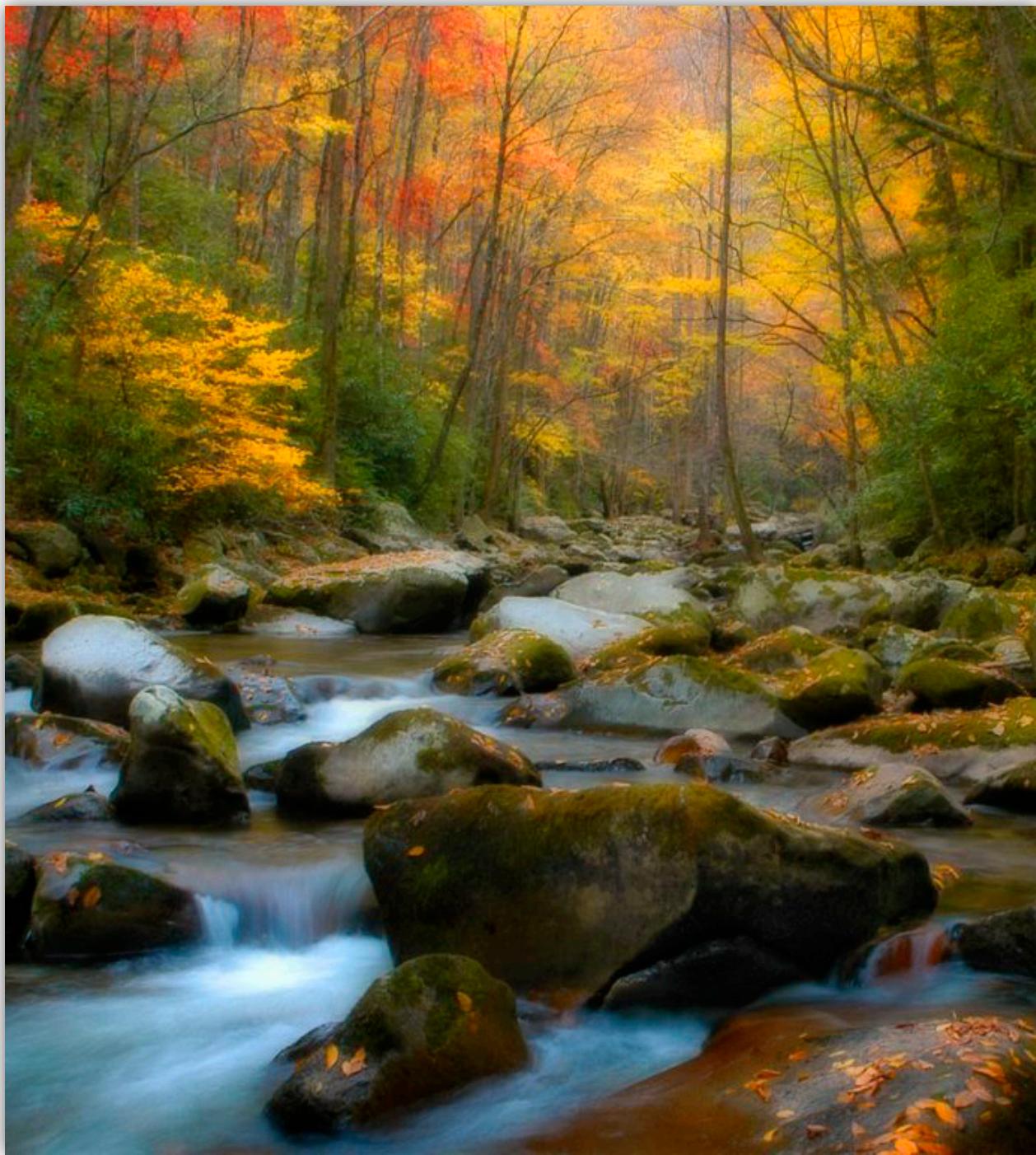
- A nipple discharge is a fairly frequently seen phenomenon in women. If it is from both the breasts, and is clear serous, then it is not indicative of cancer. However if it is blood stained and arises from a single duct or on pressure of one area, then it needs to be looked into. A fresh blood is red, and if it has been stagnant in the duct, it may be black or dark green.
- A sore confined to the nipple and not healing for a period of a number of days needs to be seen and evaluated for Pagets Disease which is a form of breast cancer.

Next Steps if diagnosed with Breast Cancer

- If you are detected to have an early disease, the surgical procedure becomes less aggressive. Surgery is today the first line of treatment, followed by the Chemotherapy and sometimes radiation.
- In early disease only the tumor with surrounding breast tissue is removed (called Lumpectomy), preserving the major part of the breast, and causing minimal or no deformity. Refinements in technique can identify when glands in the armpit need not be removed, and this is the case in significant proportion of patients with early disease. Not removing the glands in the armpit prevents the occurrence of swelling of the corresponding limb and shoulder disability.
- In patients who have larger tumors, removal of the breast (called Mastectomy) and dissection of the glands in the arm pit are required. It is today easy to reconstruct

the breast with plastic surgery after removal of the breast. However many women are quite happy wearing an appropriate prosthesis in the bra.

- There is a feeling that chemotherapy part of the treatment is very uncomfortable. However with an appropriate combination of drugs, the efficacy is increased and the immediate side effects are reduced.



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