

Student Health Centre

How common is Breast Cancer?



How common is Breast Cancer?

In Ireland, one in twelve women will develop breast cancer. Approximately 1,700 women develop breast cancer each year. It is an uncommon disease in women under 30 years of age, but the chance of developing breast cancer increases with age. Breast cancer is rare in men and accounts for 1.1% of all breast cancers.

What causes it?



In most cases there is no known cause. Hormones are probably involved. Late child bearing and having no children are linked with a higher chance of developing breast cancer. In some families, genes are inherited which put women at a slightly higher risk of developing breast cancer. This accounts for only 5% of all breast cancers.

How do you reduce your risk?

It is important to carry out breast self examination once a month in order to detect changes in the breast. * [See below]

If any changes are detected in the breast a doctor should be consulted without delay.

Try to live a healthy lifestyle, maintain a normal body weight and exercise regularly.

Women who have had more than one close female relative develop breast cancer, particularly if she developed it at a young age, should consult their GP.

How do you detect Breast Cancer?



It is recommended that women should ask their family doctor to examine their breasts once a year.

How do you detect breast cancer?

It cannot be stressed enough how important it is for women of all ages to observe and feel their breasts regularly. This helps them to become aware of their breasts and therefore recognise changes early.

*Women aged over 50 years are advised to have a mammogram -x ray examination of the breast every two - three years. Most breast cancers are found in women over the age of 50.

*In addition to the mammogram, a careful examination of the breasts by the family doctor is important as stated above.

What are the symptoms?

The earlier a cancer is diagnosed and treated, the greater the opportunity for a cure. Early detection also permits less extensive surgery and provides an opportunity for preservation of the breast.

It is important to remember that nine out of ten lumps found by women are not cancerous.

A woman who notices a lump in her breasts or is concerned about them should seek her family doctors advice. The doctor can assess the change and, if necessary, refer her to a surgeon for further assessment including mammography.

What are the symptoms of breast cancer?

- A breast lump.
- Changes in size, shape appearance or colour of breast.
- Nipple discharge or change in nipple position or shape.
- Puckering, swelling or pain.

If you have any of these symptoms, it is important that you contact your doctor straight away.

Treatment

Removing the lump, and giving radiotherapy [the use of radiation treatment to destroy cancer cells] to the rest of the breast can treat some breast cancers.

For some women the most appropriate treatment is removal of the breast[mastectomy]. Chemotherapy is frequently used and involves the use of a combination of drugs to prevent the disease recurring.

Hormone treatment – e.g. Tamoxifen – may be used, especially in postmenopausal women.

The patient will have the opportunity to discuss which option is best for her.

These treatments are often used in combination. After treatment, regular check ups are necessary to make sure that no further action is required. Most women lead normal lives after treatment for breast cancer.