



BREAST CANCER

乳癌

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Available on the HPB website: www.hpb.gov.sg

This Patient Education Booklet has been prepared based on the Clinical Practice Guidelines on Breast Cancer. It is written for patients with breast cancer, their family members and caregivers, and aims to help them understand their condition and the treatments available. It is hoped that patients, their families and caregivers would be able to use this booklet as a basis to discuss with their doctors the treatment options available to them.

Clinical Practice Guidelines are guidelines, based on the best scientific evidence currently available, to help doctors make appropriate choices about treatment of their patients' illnesses. The guidelines do not replace the judgment of the doctor. It is important to remember that each person is different, and the Clinical Practice Guidelines may not always apply to everyone.

1 WHAT IS BREAST CANCER?

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among women in Singapore, accounting for 1 out of every 4 to 5 cancers. It is on a rising trend over the last 30 years and one in 20 women will develop breast cancer in her lifetime.

Breast cancer arises from uncontrolled growth of mutated (altered) cells from the breast tissues. It becomes more common as a woman ages.

Breast cancer occurs in 2 main forms, namely pre-invasive and invasive cancer. Pre-invasive breast cancers are confined to the breast's ducts or lobules and the cancer cells do not have the ability to spread. It is classified as Stage 0 Breast Cancer.

Invasive breast cancer occurs when cancer cells spread to the surrounding breast tissues and subsequently to the lymph nodes under the armpit. These cancer cells can also move to other parts of the body like the lungs, liver and bones.

Invasive breast cancer is classified into 4 stages, from Stage 1 to 4 in ascending order of severity. The smaller the size of the invasive cancer at diagnosis, the better the chance of survival for the patient following treatment, as the likelihood of the cancer spreading would be lower.

It is important to diagnose a cancer early, especially when diagnosed in its pre-invasive form, as a cure becomes possible with treatment at this early stage.

2 HOW IS BREAST CANCER DETECTED?

Breast cancer appears as a lump on the breast. Other symptoms include changes in the nipple, the presence of discharge, pain or changes in the appearance of the skin. In its early stages, tests like mammography and breast ultrasound scans are used to reveal the presence of breast cancer before the lump can be felt.

3 HOW OFTEN SHOULD SCREENING BE DONE?

The following mammography screening guidelines are recommended for different groups of healthy women:

1. Women above 50 years
Go for screening every 2 years.
2. Women aged between 40 – 49 years
Go for annual screening.
3. Women below 40 years
There is no need for screening.

Women in the high risk category should consult their doctor regarding the frequency of screening. Women with high risk of cancer are those who have a history of:

- breast cancer in several close members of the same family
- other cancers, especially cancer of the ovary and colon, as well as breast cancer, in members of the same family
- breast cancer suffered by a close relative under the age of 40.

4 TREATMENT OF PRE-INVASIVE BREAST CANCER

Surgery is the main form of treatment for this stage of cancer. Either a **lumpectomy** (removal of the cancer with a surrounding margin of normal breast tissue) or a **mastectomy** (removal of the whole breast) can be done. Women who choose lumpectomy usually have to undergo radiation treatment or radiotherapy. The type of surgical treatment usually depends on:

- the size and extent of cancer within the breast
- the patient's suitability or desire to undergo radiotherapy.

Chemotherapy is not required for cancer detected at such an early stage.

5 TREATMENT OF INVASIVE BREAST CANCER

When the cancer is in the breast or its axillary nodes (lymph nodes in the armpit), surgery involves the removal of the cancer with or without preserving the breast. In the late stages where the cancer has spread to other parts of the body, surgery may be done to remove the cancer to reduce pain.

Chemotherapy or hormonal medication is given to reduce the chance of the cancer recurring or to treat cancer that has spread beyond the breast and the axilla (armpit). It is given orally or by injection. Whether such treatment is needed depends on:

- the stage of the cancer,
- type of the cancer cells, and
- whether a woman has reached menopause.

Chemotherapy may be used before surgery in large cancers to reduce cancer recurrence, or to increase the chance of safe breast preservation surgery.

Hormonal therapy is used for hormone responsive cancers to deprive the cancer cells of oestrogen, a hormone that is required for such cancers to grow. It is given in place of chemotherapy or following it.

Radiotherapy uses high-energy rays to kill cancer cells or stop them from growing further. It may be given over a period of time after a lumpectomy or a mastectomy. It can also be used for inoperable cancers.

6 HOW IS BREAST CANCER RECURRENCE DETECTED?

Following cancer treatment, patients are scheduled for check-ups with their doctors at regular intervals, which tend to be more frequent in the first 5 years after treatment, when the risk of cancer recurrence is highest.

This will include a physical examination of the chest, underarm, neck, and the other breast. You may also need to go for periodic mammograms, blood tests, chest X-rays and bone scans. Inform your doctor if you discover the following:

- Changes in your surgical scar and treated areas.
- Swollen lymph glands.
- Pain in your bones.
- Unusual changes in the other breast.

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你也可浏览保健促进局网站 www.hpb.gov.sg 查阅资料。

这份病人教育手册依据<<治疗乳癌临床指导原则>>编订。它是为乳癌病人、他们的家属和护理人员编写的，目的是协助他们了解病情和可供选择的疗法。病人、他们的家属和护理人员，可以依据这份手册，同医生讨论治疗方法。

<<临床疗法指导原则>>根据当前最确凿的医学证据而提供指导原则，旨在协助医生就病人的病情做出适当的决定。不过，这些指导原则不能取代医生的诊断。请切记：每个人的情况不同，临床指导原则未必适用于每一个人。