

OCTOBER IS BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

Many women do not learn much about breast health unless they breastfeed or they have a problem that needs medical attention. Becoming familiar with breast anatomy and physiology can help you understand the normal changes that occur during your lifetime. This knowledge is a good place to start learning about health problems and conditions that affect the breasts.

The breasts are made up of a complex network of milk-producing sacs, passageways for carrying milk, supporting tissue, lymph nodes, glands, tiny muscles and fat. Throughout puberty and menopause, not only does the look of the breasts change but also the structure and function of the breasts. This section describes these changes, explains breast cancer and other breast conditions as well as includes basic statistics on breast cancer.

Complementary Therapies

Many people use complementary therapies during and after their cancer care. Complementary therapies, also called integrative therapies, include things like acupuncture, herbs and prayer. Complementary therapies are used in addition to standard treatments like surgery, chemotherapy and hormone therapy. They offer people the chance to try therapies outside of their standard medical care to improve quality of life and to relieve treatment- and disease-related symptoms. Others may turn to alternative therapies, which are used instead of standard treatment. This approach is not recommended. Psychotherapy is sometimes used in combination with drugs or herbal medicine to help alleviate psychological symptoms. This monograph pertains primarily to psychotherapy as a modality in itself and does not evaluate related drugs or herbs. We do, however, note some circumstances where combined therapy is recommended or where psychotherapy should not be relied upon alone.

Warning Signs of Breast Cancer

Due to the increased use of mammography, most women are diagnosed at very early stages of breast cancer, before symptoms appear. However, not all breast cancer is found through mammography. The most common symptoms of breast cancer are a change in the look or feel of the breast, a change in the look or feel of the nipple and nipple discharge. These are listed below:

- * Lump, hard knot or thickening
- * Swelling, warmth, redness or darkening

- * Change in the size or shape of the breast
- * Dimpling or puckering of the skin
- * Itchy, scaly sore or rash on the nipple
- * Pulling in of your nipple or other parts of the breast
- * Nipple discharge that starts suddenly
- * New pain in one spot that doesn't go away

(Adapted from National Cancer Institute [23,24], American Cancer Society [25], and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [26].)

If you have any of these symptoms, you should discuss them with your health care provider right away. Although for most people these changes will turn out to be benign (not cancer), the only way to know for sure is to see your provider. For example, breast pain is more common with benign breast conditions than with breast cancer. However, if breast cancer is present, it is best to be diagnosed at an early stage, when the cancer is most treatable.

Internet Resources

Updated 10/02/09 -- A special Thanks to Susan G. Komen for the Cure®.

Risk Factors and Prevention:

Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered (FORCE) Information for people at higher risk of breast cancer.

<http://www.facingourrisk.org/>

National Cancer Institute – Genetics of Breast and Ovarian Cancer

<http://www.cancer.gov/cancerinfo/pdq/genetics/breast-and-ovarian>

National Cancer Institute – Breast Cancer Risk Assessment Tool

<http://bcra.nci.nih.gov/brc/q1.htm>

National Cancer Institute – Genetic Testing

<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Risk/BRCA>

National Institutes of Health

To search for clinical trials recruiting people with BRCA or other genetic mutations.

<http://clinicaltrials.gov>

State Cancer Legislative Database Program To find out if your state has legislation requiring coverage for prophylactic mastectomy.

<http://www.sclid-nci.net/>

Early Detection and Screening:

National Cancer Institute – Breast Cancer Risk Assessment Tool

<http://bcra.nci.nih.gov/brc/q1.htm>

National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program Information on free or low-cost mammograms.

<http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/nbccedp/>

Susan G. Komen for the Cure®

Provides information on free or low-cost mammograms and other sources of financial assistance.

<http://www.komen.org/>

U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

List of FDA-approved mammography facilities.

<http://www.fda.gov/cdrh/mammography/certified.html>

U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) – Mammography Facility Adverse Event Report Check for reports of poor quality and any correcting actions for mammography centers.

<http://www.fda.gov/cdrh/mammography/reports.html>

Diagnosis:

American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) Clinical guidelines and information on diagnosis.

<http://www.cancer.net/>

Inflammatory Breast Cancer Research Foundation Information on inflammatory breast cancer diagnosis and care.

<http://www.ibcresearch.org/>

National Cancer Institute (NCI)

Information on different types of breast cancers as well as other types of cancer that can occur in the breast, such as Phyllodes tumor.

<http://www.cancer.gov>

Triple Negative Breast Cancer Foundation Information on the triple negative breast cancer.

<http://www.tnbcfoundation.org/>

Treatment-Clinical Trial Information:

CancerConsultants.com

Free and confidential clinical trial matching and referral services.

<http://www.cancerconsultants.com/>

CenterWatch

Information on participating in clinical trials and a searchable list of current clinical trials.

<http://www.centerwatch.com/>

ECancerTrials.com

Free and confidential clinical trial matching and referral services.

<http://ecancertrials.com/>

National Cancer Institute - Clinical Trials Information on participating in clinical trials .

<http://www.cancer.gov/clinicaltrials/>

National Institutes of Health - Clinical Center and Clinical Trials Information

Information on current clinical trial research and participating in clinical trials.

<http://www.cc.nih.gov/>

<http://www.clinicaltrials.gov/>

Susan G. Komen for the Cure®

Information about clinical trials.

Clinical Trials Fact Sheet

University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC)-University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute Interactive website includes information about clinical trials and personal stories.

<http://www.upmccancercenters.com/trials/index.html>

Treatment-Information on Treatment Options:

American College of Radiology

Information on current radiation therapy treatment options.

<http://www.acr.org/>

American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) Treatment guidelines and information on treatment options.

<http://www.cancer.net/>

American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons Information on breast reconstruction.

<http://www.plasticsurgery.org/>

Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Consumer Information on Breast Implants
Information on breast implants.

<http://www.fda.gov/>

[Complementary Therapy-General Information and Search Tools for Scientific Studies:](#)

National Cancer Institute's Office of Cancer Complementary and Alternative Medicine (OCCAM) Detailed information on CAM therapies for people living with cancer.

<http://www.cancer.gov/cam>

National Institutes of Health - National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) Detailed information on complementary therapies.

<http://nccam.nih.gov/>

National Library of Medicine - Pubmed

Search for scientific articles on complementary therapies.

<http://www.pubmed.com>

Natural Standard

Detailed information on complementary therapies.

<http://www.naturalstandard.com/>.

Natural Medicines Comprehensive Medicine Database Information on complementary therapies.

<http://www.naturaldatabase.com>

[Complementary Therapies-Safety Information:](#)

National Institutes of Health Office of Dietary Supplements Information and safety alerts on dietary supplements.

<http://ods.od.nih.gov>

U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC)

Check for safety alerts on CAM therapies.

<http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/menus/consumer/health.shtm>

U.S. Federal Trade Commission's (FTC) Cure-ious Resource Page
Find information or file a report on false health product claims.
<http://www.ftc.gov/curious>

U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
Check for safety alerts on CAM therapies.
<http://www.fda.gov/opacom/7alerts.html>

U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Fake Cancer Cures Check for scam treatments.
<http://www.fda.gov/cder/news/fakecancercures.htm>

U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Medwatch Find drug and medical product information or file a report on a drug or medical product safety concern.
<http://www.fda.gov/medwatch>

U.S. Pharmacopeia (USP)
Check if a dietary supplement has been tested and USP verified for integrity, purity and safe manufacturing.
<http://www.usp.org/USPVerified/dietarySupplements/>

[Complementary Therapies-Check the Licensing Status of a CAM Provider:](#)

American Association of Naturopathic Physicians
<http://www.naturopathic.org/>

American Massage Therapy Association
<http://www.amtamassage.org/>

Federation of Chiropractic Licensing Boards
<http://www.fclb.org/>

National Certification Board for Therapeutic Massage and Bodywork
<http://www.ncbtmb.com/>

National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM)
<http://www.nccaom.org/find/index.html>

Complementary Therapies-Clinical Trials:

National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine Information on and a listing of clinical trials of complementary therapies.

<http://nccam.nih.gov/research/clinicaltrials/>

See also Treatment-Clinical Trials (above).

Complementary Therapies-Find Integrated Health Care Organizations and Centers:

Dirline

Find a local health care organization or center offering complementary/integrative therapies.

<http://dirline.nlm.nih.gov>

Getting Good Care:

Administrators in Medicine-Association of State Medical Board Executive Directors

Search for a licensed physician.

<http://www.docboard.org/>

American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS)

Verify a physician is board certified.

<http://www.abms.org/>

American Cancer Society

Information on care for people living with cancer.

<http://www.cancer.org/>

American Medical Association - DoctorFinder

Search for a licensed physician.

<http://www.ama-assn.org/aps/amahg.htm>

Health Care Choices

Search for information on many breast cancer care issues, including patient volume data and insurance coverage.

<http://www.healthcarechoices.org>

Joint Commission for the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations

Find a health care organization that meets the Commission's safety and quality standards.

<http://www.qualitycheck.org/consumer/searchOCR.aspx>

Intercultural Cancer Council

Promotes programs and policies to remove ethnic/racial barriers to breast cancer care.

<http://iccnetwork.org/>

National Cancer Institute (NCI)

Information on care for people living with cancer.

<http://www.cancer.gov/>

National Center for Quality Assurance (NCQA)

Find the accreditation rating (based on quality standards) for a health management organization (HMO).

<http://reportcard.ncqa.org/>

National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship (NCCS)

Find the publication "Teamwork: The Cancer Patient's Guide To Talking With Your Doctor".

<http://www.canceradvocacy.org/>

U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

List of FDA-approved mammography facilities.

<http://www.fda.gov/cdrh/mammography/certified.html>

U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) - Mammography Facility Adverse Event Report

Check for reports of poor quality and any correcting actions for mammography centers.

<http://www.fda.gov/cdrh/mammography/reports.html>

After Treatment:

Fertile Hope

Provides financial aid to women with breast cancer whose insurance will not cover fertility treatment.

<http://www.fertilehope.org/>

National Cancer Institute - Prevention, Genetics, Causes

Information on genetic testing for inherited gene mutations related to breast cancer.

http://www.cancer.gov/cancer_information/prevention/

National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

Information on weight control and physical activity.

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/>

National Lymphedema Network
Information on lymphedema .

<http://www.lymphnet.org/>

Young Survival Coalition

Information and networking services for young breast cancer survivors.

<http://www.youngsurvival.org/>

Social Support:

American Cancer Society - Cancer Survivors Network
Online community for cancer survivors and caregivers.

<http://www.acscsn.org/>

American Cancer Society - Reach to Recovery

Provides in-person and telephone support for people living with cancer.

<http://www.cancer.org/>

American Cancer Society - I Can Cope

Supports people living with cancer as well as and spouses and partners.

<http://www.cancer.org/>

The Association of Cancer Online Resources

Find an online support group.

<http://www.acor.org/>

CancerCare

Find an online support group.

<http://www.cancercare.org/>

Gilda's Club Worldwide

Offers support services to people living with cancer and their family and friends.

<http://www.gildasclub.org/>

Living Beyond Breast Cancer

Information on breast cancer support and care.

<http://www.lbbc.org/>

Mautner Project for Lesbians with Cancer

Social support services for lesbian women living with cancer and their partners.

<http://www.mautnerproject.org/>

Men Against Breast Cancer

Provides services to help men be good caregivers of women with breast cancer.

<http://www.menagainstbreastcancer.org/>

National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship (NCCS)

Find the publication "Teamwork: The Cancer Patient's Guide To Talking With Your Doctor".

<http://www.canceradvocacy.org/>

National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization

Find local hospice care.

<http://www.nhpco.org/>

Susan G. Komen for the Cure® - Talking with Your Health Care Provider

Visit the "Questions to Ask your Doctor" section.

<http://www.komen.org/>

The Wellness Community

Provides support to people living with cancer and their families.

<http://www.thewellnesscommunity.org/>

Well Spouse Foundation

Provides social support to spouses and partners.

<http://www.wellspouse.org/>

[Financing Issues-General Information:](#)

A.M. Best Company

Find insurance company ratings.

<http://www.ambest.com/>

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)

Find the publication "Choosing and Using a Health Plan".

<http://www.ahrq.gov/consumer/>

America's Health Insurance Plans

National directory of health insurance plans and information on types of coverage.

<http://www.ahip.org/>

American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)

Information on health issues, Medicare and health insurance programs for people over 50.

<http://www.aarp.org/health/>

American Cancer Society - Taking Charge of Money Matters workshop

A financial workshop for people living with cancer.

<http://www.cancer.org/>

Association of Community Cancer Centers

Find the publication "Cancer Treatments Your Insurance Should Cover".

<http://www.accc-cancer.org/>

Medicare (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)

Information on the Medicare health insurance program, including Medicare prescription drug plans.

<http://www.medicare.gov>

Medicaid

Find your state's Medicaid toll-free hotline.

<http://cms.hhs.gov/medicaid>

National Association of Insurance Commissioners

Find your state insurance commissioner.

<http://www.naic.org/>

National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship

Find publications including, "Working It Out: Your Employment Rights as a Cancer Survivor", "What Cancer Survivors Need to Know About Health Insurance" and "A Cancer Survivor's Almanac: Charting Your Journey".

<http://www.canceradvocacy.org/>

Patient Advocate Foundation

Offers legal and advocacy help when disputing insurance claim denials, as well as financial assistance information.

<http://www.patientadvocate.org/>

[Financing Issues-Medical Assistance:](#)

Breast Cancer Network of Strength

Financial assistance for wigs, prostheses and mastectomy bras.

<http://www.networkofstrength.org/>

CancerCare

Financial assistance for diagnostic work-ups, as well as information on drug assistance programs. Provides information about specific prescription drug assistance programs.

See also Transportation Assistance.

<http://www.cancer.org/>

NeedyMeds.com

Drug assistance program information.

<http://www.needymeds.com/>

Partnership for Prescription Assistance

Drug assistance program information.

<https://www.pparx.org/>

Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America

Directory of drug manufacturers' assistance programs.

<http://www.phrma.org/>

Social Security Administration

Find your local social security office.

<https://s044a90.ssa.gov/apps6z/FOLO/fo001.jsp>

Susan G. Komen for the Cure® and CancerCare's Linking A.R.M.S.(TM)

Financial assistance for some medications and medical supplies.

<http://www.cancer.org/>

Susan G. Komen for the Cure® and Patient Advocate Foundation's Co-Pay Relief (CPR) Program

Provides insurance co-payment assistance.

<http://www.patientadvocate.org/>

[Financing Issues-Transportation and Lodging Assistance Transportation Assistance:](#)

Air Charity Network

Air travel assistance for people living with cancer and their caregivers.

<http://aircharitynetwork.org>

American Cancer Society - Road to Recovery

Local transportation assistance .

<http://www.cancer.org/>

CancerCare

Financial assistance for transportation to and from treatment.

Childcare when a parent is having tests or treatment.

<http://www.cancer.org/>

Corporate Angel Network

Air travel assistance for people living with cancer.

<http://www.corpangelnetwork.org/>

Lifeline Pilots

Air travel assistance for people living with cancer and their caregivers.

<http://www.airlifelinemidwest.org/index2.htm>

Mercy Medical Airlift

Air travel assistance for people living with cancer and their caregivers.

<http://www.mercymedical.org/>

National Patient Air Travel HELPLINE

Air travel assistance for people living with cancer and their caregivers.

<http://www.patienttravel.org/>

Raquel's Wings for Life

Air travel assistance for people living with cancer and their caregivers.

<http://raquelswingsforlife.com/default.html>

Lodging Assistance:

American Cancer Society's Hope Lodges

Provide lodging for families during cancer treatments.

<http://www.cancer.org/>