



Breast Cancer

Do What's Best for Your Breasts

One in 29 South African women develops breast cancer every year, with more than 3000 deaths annually. The good news is that you can actively reduce your risk of getting breast cancer and, even if you do get it, early detection can lead to a full recovery.

Breast cancer is now a leading cancer among South African women. It occurs when cells replicate faster than normal and form lumps of extra tissue, known as tumours. These lumps can be benign (non-cancerous) or malignant (cancerous). If malignant, cancer cells can invade the bloodstream and the lymphatic system, spreading to other areas of the body, damaging vital organs and possibly causing death.

A monthly self-examination is an effective way for women to check for lumps. Warning signs may include painful breasts, changes in the breasts and nipples and changes in the skin around the breasts and armpits.

Mammograms (a specialised breast X-ray), ultrasound testing and biopsies are other tests used to detect breast cancer - the earlier breast cancer is detected, the better.

There are two categories of breast cancer, invasive and non-invasive. Non-invasive cancer usually doesn't spread but can become invasive. Invasive cancer can move to other parts of the body, or travel in the bloodstream or lymph nodes.

Treatment for breast cancer depends on the stage and type of the cancer, as well as age and health. It can range from removal of breast lumps, radiation, chemotherapy, hormone treatment and surgery, such as a lumpectomy or a mastectomy, where parts or all of the breast tissue may be removed, as well as the removal of lymph glands.

Even though certain risk factors are beyond your control - such as family history and ageing - there are many good habits that could keep your breasts healthy and cancer-free.

Maintaining good general health is the best start you can make. Be aware of your environment as this influences your risk status. Clean air, clean water, nutritious food and a healthy lifestyle are all very important.

Avoid smoking, keep your alcohol intake to a minimum and manage your weight carefully. A monthly self-examination and regular mammograms are also essential. Looking after yourself and doing your best to stay healthy will go a long way in reducing your chances of ever getting breast cancer.

Control What You Can

Healthy choices can make all the difference when it comes to breast cancer.

Minimise or avoid alcohol. Research has shown that consuming more than one alcoholic beverage a day can increase your breast cancer risk by as much as 25%. Try healthier alternatives such as water, fruit cocktails and alcohol-free mixers.

Make screening a monthly habit. Examine your breasts monthly and go straight to your doctor if you find a lump or if you notice a change in the skin around your breasts and armpits.

Get some rays. An annual mammogram, especially if you're over 40, is an excellent way to detect breast cancer in the early stages.

Knowledge is power. Read women's magazines, Internet research and blogs to understand your own realistic level of risk. Then take action to manage your risks in the best ways you can. Seek help from an EAP counsellor if you need advice and support.

Go for supplements. Eating the optimal diet is no easy task. Supplement your diet with vitamins and minerals such as Omega 3 fats and the cancer-protective mineral Selenium. Speak to your doctor or pharmacist for specialist advice.

For more tips on healthy lifestyle choices for breast cancer visit www.health24.com

Eat Defensively!

Prevention is always better than cure...food can be your best defence against breast cancer.

Vegetables that offer breast cancer protection include broccoli, cabbage, brussel sprouts, turnip greens, cauliflower, dark leafy greens, carrots and tomatoes. All these are best served raw or lightly cooked.

Fruits that offer breast cancer protection include citrus, berries and cherries.

Some foods are renowned for their anti-cancer properties - these include soy and foods with Omega-3 fatty acids like sardines, salmon, herring, tuna, cod, mackerel, halibut, flaxseed, walnuts and beans.

Minimise your intake of sunflower, corn and cottonseed oils. Rather use canola and olive oil or indulge in food that contains naturally good fats like avocados and oily fish high in Omega-3.

When it comes to carbohydrates, rather go brown than white. Add brown rice, brown sugar, whole grains and beans to your diet.

Time to Switch Gears

We are all becoming increasingly aware of the need to improve our environment. Making changes all around you can make all the difference...

Why should I stop drinking?

Alcohol is the most well-established dietary risk factor for breast cancer

Just three alcoholic drinks a day put you at a greater risk of getting breast cancer than a teetotaler.

Why should I stop smoking?

Research has shown that up to 90% of cancers are due to environmental factors, including tobacco smoke

Smoking is the second largest cause of death globally - it kills one in 10 adults worldwide

If you're a non-smoker but you're exposed to second-hand smoke, you're still at risk so encourage smokers to seek help to kick this habit.

Why should I manage my weight carefully?

Research has shown that women who maintain a healthy body weight reduce their risk of contracting breast cancer

Weight gain, particularly in midlife, raises your risk of breast cancer significantly

Diet is estimated to be responsible for about 30-40% of all cancers. A diet low in fat, high in vegetables and fibre, and food with anti-cancer properties is optimal.

For more info on breast cancer, contact a Kaelo Patient Manager or EAP counsellor, or visit www.cansa.org