

## Breast Cancer and Men

Every one of us, men and women, children and adults, regardless of age or ancestry, are at risk of developing cancer. Some cancers are more prevalent in certain groups; others, like breast cancer, can affect anyone. Even men.

Breast cancer is a malignant tumor that has developed from abnormal cells in the breast. Although breast cancer occurs mainly in women, it will occasionally be diagnosed in men. Many people don't realize that men also have breast tissue that can become cancerous. Unfortunately, male breast cancer can receive low priority by the medical profession.

Prior to puberty, young girls and boys all have a small amount of tissue in their breasts. This tissue consists of a few tubular passages, known as ducts. These ducts are located beneath the areola and the nipple. During puberty, a girl's ovaries will begin to produce female hormones, which in turn cause the ducts in the breasts to grow in preparation for lactation. Milk glands called "lobules" form at the end of these ducts, and there is an increase in the fatty and connective tissues known as stroma.

The hormones produced by the male testicles work in the opposite way, and prevent breast tissue from developing. Although a man's breast tissue does contain ducts, it only has a few lobules. Just like all of the cells in his body, a man's breast duct cells can develop cancerous changes. Breast cancer is more common in women simply because the female hormones cause breast growth and, as a result, women have more breast cells than men.

There are several different types of breast disorders that can affect men and women equally, although most of them are benign. Tumors are considered "benign" when they are not cancerous and do not spread beyond the breast area. While not life threatening, these breast disorders are certainly causes for concern. Malignant tumors, on the other hand, are cancerous and can be life threatening.

The lymphatic vessels are an important element of the breast, in men and women. These vessels are also big players in the role of carrying cancerous cells from the breast to the other parts of the body. The lymphatic system carries the lymph, a clear liquid containing tissue fluid, as well as immune system cells and any disposable waste products. Lymph nodes are small oval-shaped cells that are situated within the immune system, and located along the lymphatic vessels. This system is so efficient, it is possible for cancerous cells to enter the lymphatic vessels and spread to the lymph nodes extremely quickly. This is how cancer can spread so quickly throughout the body.

The majority of lymphatic vessels within the breast are connected to the axillary lymph nodes, situated under the arm. Other lymphatic vessels connect to lymph nodes inside the chest, known as internal mammary nodes. Supra or infraclavicular nodes are another type of lymph nodes, found just above or below the collarbone. When cancerous cells reach the axillary lymph nodes, the cells may continue to grow and cause the lymph nodes in the underarm area to swell. Should the breast cancer cells spread to the lymph nodes under the arm, (known as metastatic spread) they have likely traveled to other organs in the body as well

Before choosing a method of treatment, it is essential for doctors to determine whether the breast cancer is contained or has spread to the axillary lymph nodes and other parts of the body.

Finding a lump in the breast or breast area is a serious concern that must not be taken lightly. Any woman or man who detects a lump or sore spot on the breast, under the arm or just above or below the collarbone must seek a professional assessment immediately.