



BREAST Q&A CANCER





The term “cancer” covers more than a hundred diseases that share one trait: the uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells that destroy healthy tissues and have the potential to spread outside its site of origin. When a malignant tumour originates in the breast, it is called **breast cancer**.

1 IN 15 WOMEN



Breast cancer is the commonest cancer among females in Hong Kong. Between 1993 and 2017, the number of diagnosed breast cancer cases among women in Hong Kong increased by 3.8 times. From 1,152 cases per year to 4,373 cases per year, with an average of 12 women diagnosed each day. One in 15 women has a chance to suffer from breast cancer in her life. Breast cancer is the third leading cause of cancer deaths among females in Hong Kong, after lung and colorectal cancers. In 2017, a total of 721 women died from breast cancer, accounting for 12.3% of all cancer deaths in females.

In 2017, 51% of breast cancer cases occurred in women aged 40-59. The median age of diagnosed sufferers in Hong Kong is 57 years old. The older the age, the higher the risk. However, this does not mean that young people will not suffer from breast cancer. The youngest patient in Hong Kong is less than 20 years old.

 **Even so, if breast cancer can be detected early, the cure rate is over 80%.**



There may be a lot of myths about breast cancer among fellow sisters. Please read the following information carefully and you may know more about this disease.

1

Breast cancer must cause chest pain?

Not necessarily! Some patients experience chest pain, but not all. The medical rationale indicates that chest pain will occur if breast cancer cells touch the nerve line. On the contrary, there will be no pain if the cancer cells do not touch the nerve.

In addition, chest pain does not necessarily mean breast cancer. Chest pain may also occur in case of hormone changes before or after menstruation, benign breast hyperplasia or breast fibroids. Some of them can heal by themselves so you don't need to be over worried about breast pain. Yet, it does not mean you can completely ignore the pain as some breast diseases can develop to serious diseases.

2

What are the symptoms of breast cancer?

- Lumps in the breast
- Dimpling or puckering on the chest
- Nipple retraction, discharge or bleeding
- Swelling of the lymph glands in the armpit

* Patients may only have some symptoms



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Do women suffer from breast cancer only after they have had their first sexual intercourse?

No. Women with or without sexual experience have the opportunity to suffer from breast cancer.

4

Only busty women have the chance to suffer from breast cancer?

No. Breast cancer is caused by abnormal breast tissue. Breast tissue is not significantly different among women. Therefore, breast size is not directly related to the risk of breast cancer.

However, obesity is a high-risk factor in breast cancer. Obese women have a higher risk to suffer from breast cancer than general women.

5

Only women get the chance of suffering from breast cancer?

No. Both men and women have breast tissue and have the opportunity to undergo cellular changes. Therefore, both men and women have the opportunity to suffer from breast cancer.

6

What is the chance of breast cancer cure?

Breast cancer treatment is determined by different factors, including age, health status, stage of breast cancer and tumour size etc. of the patient. There is no standardised answer. Common treatment methods include the following five:



Surgical Treatment

Removal of cancer cells: including total mastectomy or breast-conserving surgery, axillary sentinel lymph node biopsy or removal, etc.



Radiation Treatment

Radiation treatment is a form of treatment using ionising radiation to kill cancer cells. Radiation is capable of inflicting damage at the DNA level of a cell and can stop cells from reproducing.



Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy is a form of treatment using medicines called cytotoxic drugs which kill or control cancer cells. The administered cytotoxic drugs enter the bloodstream and travel to all parts of the body. The drugs destroy breast cancer cells by interfering with their ability to grow and divide. Several drugs are given in combination and each drug damages the cells at some point in their reproductive cycle.



Hormonal Therapy

Hormonal therapy has played an important role in all stages of the treatment and prevention strategy for breast cancer. Breast cancers all develop from abnormal breast cells which are often sensitive to sex hormones, such as oestrogen and progesterone. By depriving cancer tumours of these hormones the growth stimulus is removed. Hormonal therapy is usually used after surgery, chemotherapy, or radiotherapy.



Targeted Therapy

Targeted therapy drugs treat and soothe the disease through specific molecules that interfere with the growth and survival of cancer cells. The principle of targeted therapy drugs is similar to chemotherapy. However, targeted therapy drugs are more targeted and specifically dealing with the lethal point of cancer cells, thus affect normal cells less. Since chemotherapeutic drugs attack all active dividing cells on a large area, there are more side effects than targeted therapy drugs.



7

Does breast cancer surgery remove the entire breast?

According to specific conditions of each patient, the doctor will recommend the most suitable surgery. Factors that will be considered include tumour size, level of spread, patient's physical condition, recurrence rate, etc.

What is breast prosthesis?

After total mastectomy or breast-conserving surgery, the physical appearance of the patient will be affected. Some of them will lose confidence.

Breast prosthesis is an artificial breast which is made from medical-grade soft silicone gel. The shape and texture of breast prosthesis are similar to a natural breast. There are full breast prosthesis and shaped breast prosthesis.

Breast prosthesis can help patient rebuild confidence, ease the discomfort associated with surgery by relieving stiffness, numbness and pain in the neck and shoulders. This helps alleviate the adverse impact after surgery.

8

Which population would have higher risk of breast cancer?

The etiology of some patients is unknown but lifestyle habits are closely related to the risk of disease, including:



Inherited factor

- Gene mutations
- Family inheritance

Acquired factor

- Lack of physical activity
- Alcohol consumption
- Obesity after menopause
- Advancing age
- First childbirth over 30 years old, no childbirth or no breastfeeding
- Menarche before 12 years old or menopause over 55 years old
- History of breast cancer, ovarian cancer or endometrial cancer
- History of benign breast conditions or lobular carcinoma in situ
- Receiving hormonal replacement therapy
- Using combined oral contraceptives
- History of receiving radiation therapy to the chest before 30 years old



There are three main inspection methods:



Breast Self-Examination

- Please perform once a month
- If you still menstruate, examine your breasts 2-3 days after menstrual period
- If you no longer menstruate, examine your breasts on the first day of each month for easy memory

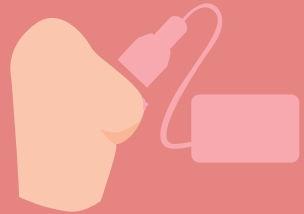
Method of examination:

1. Stand in front of a mirror, undress and raise your arms over your head and look for any changes in your breasts.
2. Press the pads of your three middle fingers gently over the inner side of your breast in circling movements to check for any unusual lumps.
3. Examine the area between the breast and the armpit for any unusual lumps.
4. Gently squeeze the nipple and look for any discharge.



Ultrasound examination of the breasts

Ultrasound examination of the breasts is safe and painless. It uses sonic scanning to scan the breasts and underarms and examine breast tissue. This method can check whether there is a lump in the chest, its size, and whether it is malignant or benign, etc. Ultrasound examination does not contain radiation and is with an accuracy of 81-95%. Women of all ages including breastfeeding or pregnant women are suitable for this examination.



The incidence rate of breast cancer is higher among women aged over 40. Therefore, a comprehensive breast health check-up should be performed regularly.

Mammogram

Overseas medical research has proven that screening can reduce breast cancer mortality by 20%-30%. A mammogram every one to two years starting at age 40 or 50 is recommended. However, women who have had breast augmentation surgery may be affected and are recommended to consult the doctor before checking.



Screening mammography screening is a low dose X-ray examination of a woman's breasts used to detect breast cancer when that cancer is too small to be felt as a lump, and calcium points which are extremely small. It allows early detection even at the stage of precancerous lesions or before the formation of tumor, thus helps reduce breast cancer mortality.

The radiation risk of mammography screening is 0.36 millisieverts per test. According to the international standards, human body can receive 1 millisievert of artificial radiation per year. Therefore, mammogram does not cause cancer due to radiation under normal circumstances. However, if you are or may be pregnant, X-ray examination is not recommended because it may affect the fetus.

♥ Tips + ♥

Don't panic. By practicing the following healthy lifestyle habits, we can reduce the risks of breast cancer:



- ✓ Regular exercise, at least 150 minutes of medium-intensity exercise per week (such as walking up and down staircase or running)
- ✓ Avoid using alcohol and tobacco
- ✓ Maintain a healthy weight (body mass index between 18.5-22.9), women's waistline is targeted at 80 cm.

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Many studies have found that stress will increase the risk of cancer. Remember to **keep a good mood**, find out the suitable ways to reduce stress, have a **balanced diet** and reduce the intake of high-calorie food. These all are conducive to **strengthening your immune system** and keeping you healthy.

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Community Resources

Free Breast Screening Programme

Since 2011, Breast Health Centre (BHC) has launched a programme to support women in need to attend breast screening. The programme provides free testing to women over 40 who receive Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA), traffic allowance or disability allowance; and women in need who meet the eligibility criteria.

The foundation also provides other check up service with a fee.

For details, please refer to <https://www.hkbcf.org/en>



Application





Our Services

Action for REACH OUT (AFRO)
provides free screening tests for
HIV, Syphilis, results are available in 10 min-
utes. We also provide Gonorrhea and Chlamydia
(partly subsidised), and Pap smear test (free).

**There is no need to provide your identification
document and all information will be kept confidential.**

If you have any enquiries, please feel free to contact us
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(Monday - Friday 09:00am - 10:00 p.m.)

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