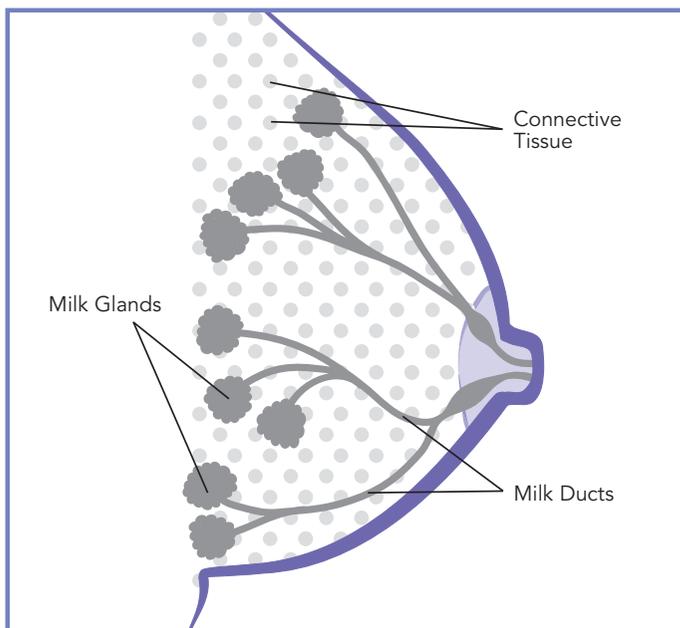


# Understanding Breast Health



## What are my breasts made of?

A breast is made up of three main parts: glands, ducts, and connective tissue. The glands produce milk. The ducts are passages that carry milk to the nipple. The connective tissue (which consists of fibrous and fatty tissue) connects and holds everything together.



## What is a normal breast?

No breast is typical. What is normal for you may not be normal for another woman. Most women say their breasts feel lumpy or uneven. The way your breasts look and feel can be affected by getting your period, having children, losing or gaining weight, and taking certain medications. Breasts also tend to change as you age.

## What causes breast lumps?

Many different conditions can cause lumps in the breast, including cancer. But most breast lumps are caused by other medical conditions. The two most common causes of breast lumps are fibrocystic breast condition and cysts. Fibrocystic condition causes noncancerous changes in the breast that can make them lumpy, tender, and sore. Cysts are small fluid-filled sacs that can develop in the breast.

## Tumors and breast cancer

Sometimes breast cells become abnormal. These abnormal cells grow, divide, and create new cells that the body does not need and that do not function normally. The extra cells form a mass called a tumor. Some tumors are “benign” or not cancer. These tumors usually stay in one spot in the breast and do not cause big health problems. Other tumors are “malignant” and are cancer. Breast cancer often starts out too small to be felt. As it grows, it can spread throughout the breast or to other parts of the body. This causes serious health problems and can cause death.

## How can I tell if I have breast cancer?

Most of the time, early breast cancer **does not** have any symptoms. As it grows, however, breast cancer can cause changes in how the breast looks or feels. Symptoms include:

- A new lump in the breast
- A lump that has changed
- A change in the size or shape of the breast
- Pain in the breast or nipple that does not go away
- Skin anywhere on the breast that is flaky, red, or swollen
- A nipple that is very tender or that suddenly turns inward
- Fluid coming from the nipple when not nursing a baby

See your health professional if you notice any of these symptoms. Most often, breast symptoms are caused by conditions other than cancer, but only your doctor can tell.

**If you have a question about any breast lump, if you notice a new lump, or if a lump has changed, talk with your health professional.**

## Is breast cancer the most common cause of death for women?

No. Although many women get breast cancer, it is not a common cause of death. Heart disease is the number one cause of death among women age 40 and above, followed by stroke, lung cancer, and lung diseases. Breast cancer is the **fifth** leading cause of death. Each year, about 210,000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer. Many fewer women, around 40,000 each year, die from breast cancer.

## What increases my chance of getting breast cancer?

- **Age:** The older you are, the more likely you are to develop breast cancer. The chances of dying from breast cancer also increase as a woman gets older, but dying from breast cancer is much less common than getting breast cancer.
- **Family History:** Having close relatives with breast cancer or ovarian cancer increases your chance of getting breast cancer.
- **Race:** All women can get breast cancer, but white women get it more often than Hispanic, African American, Asian, or Native American women. Although medical experts do not know why, African American women are more likely to die from breast cancer than women of other racial and ethnic groups.
- **Having Children:** Not having children, or having your first child later in life (in your 30s or 40s), increases your chance of getting breast cancer.
- **Certain Medications:** Taking hormone replacement therapy (HRT) drugs after menopause may increase your chance of getting breast cancer. Talk to your doctor about the risks and benefits for you.
- **Personal History:** Having had cancer in one breast increases the chance of getting cancer in the other breast.

## Common myths about breast cancer

You cannot get breast cancer by bumping, bruising, pinching, or touching the breast. You also cannot catch breast cancer from another person.

## Staying healthy and preventing cancer

Scientists are studying how best to prevent breast cancer. Staying healthy may help. To protect your overall health and to prevent many kinds of cancer:

- Eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables every day.
- Get regular physical activity.
- Aim for a healthy weight.
- Do not have more than one alcoholic drink a day.
- Do not smoke; if you do smoke, quit.

## Is there a test to look for breast cancer?

Yes. A mammogram, or an x-ray picture of the breast, is used to look for breast cancer.

## Why should I have a mammogram?

Regular mammograms are the best tests doctors have to find breast cancer early, sometimes up to three years before it can be felt. When their breast cancer is found early, many women go on to live long and healthy lives.

## When should I get a mammogram?

Most women should have their first mammogram at age 40, and then have another mammogram every one or two years. If you have any symptoms or changes in your breast, or if breast cancer runs in your family, talk to your health professional. He or she may recommend that you have mammograms earlier or more often than usual.

## Where can I get a mammogram and who can I talk to if I have questions?

- If you have a regular doctor, talk to him or her.
- Call the National Cancer Institute's Cancer Information Service (CIS) at **1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237)**. For TTY: **1-800-332-8615**.
- For Medicare information, you can call **1-800 MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227)**.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has a program called the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program, which works with health departments and other groups to provide low-cost or free mammograms to women who qualify. For more information, call your health department, the numbers above or **1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)**

