

Breast Cancer

Breast Cancer is the third biggest cancer killer in Hong Kong. One in every 22 women suffers from it and about 2,000 new cases are diagnosed every year. With the increasing incidence of breast cancer in younger women, the earlier you pay attention to breast health, the better. Young women without a family history of cancer who think they lead a healthy lifestyle can get it. About half of breast cancer cases affect women aged between 40 and 55.

The most important symptom is the presence of a lump in the breast tissue, and not pain. Another important indication is nipple discharge, especially if it is bloody or clear fluid. So is a change or deformity in the skin and nipple.

Early detection saves lives. Women can help themselves by doing regular self-examinations. From the age of 20, every woman should get into the habit of conducting a monthly breast-self-examination (BSE). The best time for a BSE is a week after menstruation. They should become familiar with their own breasts so as to be able to quickly detect any changes.

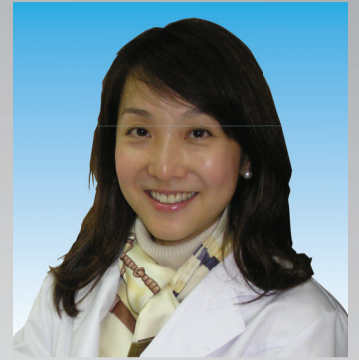
Between ages 20-39, a clinical breast examination (CBE) by a doctor should be done once every two or three years. From the age of 40, a CBE should be done once a year and mammograms with or without ultrasound once every two years.

Although the gold standard, mammograms only detect 85 to 90 percent of cancers. Ultrasound complements mammograms especially in young women, but cannot replace it. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is a more sensitive imaging method, mainly used to screen young women at high risk, or to clarify mammogram and ultrasound findings. Screening helps detect asymptomatic cancers at an early, curable stage, up to two years before they manifest as a palpable lump.

Diagnosis is made with needle biopsies, a minimally invasive way to obtain cells or tissue from the tumour for pathological examination. There is a common misconception that poking the tumour with a needle will make it spread. On the contrary, needle biopsy is a standard investigation, part of the "Triple Assessment" of breast lesions, which also include clinical examination and radiological examination (mammograms/ ultrasound).

Surgical resection gives the best hope of curing the cancer. Chemotherapy, radiotherapy and hormonal therapy are often used as adjuncts to reduce the chance of recurrence and distant spread.

Not every cancer patients needs to lose her breasts. We try to conserve the breast as much as possible. Those who need a mastectomy can consider reconstructive surgery which gives excellent cosmetic results. Meanwhile, women can help themselves by being aware of their breast health. Remember that early detection saves lives.



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