جمعية زهرة
ZAHRA ASSOCIATION

Male Breast Cancer Guide

"Men Too" Campaign



Is breast cancer exclusively a women's disease?

Many believe that breast cancer affects women only. However, men also have breast tissue, although in much smaller amounts. Breast cancer occurs when cells in this tissue begin to grow and divide abnormally and out of control, eventually forming a tumor.
Male breast cancer is a rare type of cancer, accounting for only about 0.7% of all breast cancer cases in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This information is not intended to cause alarm, but rather to correct misconceptions and encourage awareness of any unusual changes.

Warning Signs and Symptoms

- The appearance of a new lump or thickening in the breast area, which is often painless.
- Changes in the breast skin, such as redness, scaling, or puckering.
- Changes in the nipple, such as alterations in color, shape, or scaling.
- Nipple retraction or turning inward.
- Nipple discharge, especially if it is bloody.
- A lump or swelling under the armpit, which may be the first thing some men notice.

These signs do not necessarily indicate cancer; they may be caused by other conditions. However, if any of these signs are noticed, you should consult a doctor to perform the necessary examinations.
Many men are diagnosed at a relatively late stage due to ignoring the symptoms or not expecting the disease.

Risk Factors

Factors that may increase the likelihood of developing the disease include:

Age: Risk increases with advancing age.

Family History: A history of breast cancer in the family (on either the father's or mother's side) increases the risk.

Inherited Genetic Mutations: Particularly the BRCA2 mutation and, less commonly, BRCA1.

Elevated Estrogen Levels: All men produce small amounts of estrogen, which is completely normal, but elevated levels may increase the risk. Causes of elevation include obesity, chronic liver disease, and certain hormone therapies.

Obesity: Associated with increased estrogen levels.

Klinefelter Syndrome: Occurs when a male is born with more than one X chromosome.

Prior Radiation Therapy: Previous radiation treatment to the chest area.

Having one or more risk factors does not guarantee that you will develop cancer, and conversely, some men with no known risk factors may still develop it. If you have a family history of breast cancer or a known inherited genetic mutation in your family, ask your doctor about genetic counseling.

When to See a Doctor?

Upon noticing a new lump or thickening in the breast. If any new changes occur in the shape of the nipple or skin.

If nipple discharge appears.
Consult a doctor whether the change is accompanied by pain or not; the absence of pain does not mean the absence of a problem. Paying attention to any new change is the first step, but diagnosis must be made by a physician—you cannot rely solely on pamphlets or self-observation.
There is no shame in seeing a doctor for breast-related concerns; it is a matter of your health. Embarrassment and delay can postpone diagnosis.

How is it Diagnosed?

Evaluation usually begins with a clinical examination and may include imaging (mammogram or ultrasound). The diagnosis is confirmed by taking a tissue sample (biopsy).
A mammogram is used in men to evaluate an existing lump or presentation, and it is not required as a routine screening for all men. The need for follow-up or imaging is determined based on risk level, medical history, and the recommendation of a specialist.

Treatment

The fundamentals of male breast cancer treatment are similar to those used for women and include:
Surgery: Removing the tumor, which may include removing lymph nodes.
Radiation Therapy: Using high-energy rays to destroy cancer cells.
Chemotherapy: Drug treatments that destroy cancer cells.

Hormone Therapy: Blocking hormones that stimulate cancer cell growth. This is a common treatment because most cases in men are hormone-receptor-positive.
Targeted Therapy: Targeting specific genes or characteristics within cancer cells.
Immunotherapy: Stimulating the body's immune system to recognize and attack cancer cells, used in specific cases.

The doctor determines the treatment plan according to the tumor type, stage, grade, size, and hormone sensitivity, while taking the patient's general health into account. Early detection increases the chances of successful treatment and recovery.

Facts and Misconceptions

Common Misconception | Fact
Breast cancer is exclusively for women | Men can also develop it, although it is less common.
Any breast lump means cancer | Lumps can result from other causes, including benign breast enlargement in men (gynecomastia), which is common. However, any new lump deserves a medical evaluation.
No pain means no problem | Some changes are painless. Any new change deserves a medical evaluation, whether it is painful or not.
Mammograms are for women only | They may be used in men when needed, but they are not routine screenings for all men.

Family history only affects women | Family history, including genetic mutations, can increase the risk in men as well.
I would know if I had it because symptoms are obvious | Symptoms can be mild and painless, leading them to be ignored. Having less breast tissue may make a lump easier to notice, but awareness and seeing a doctor are what accelerate diagnosis.

Our Message

"Men Too": When you notice any new change, do not ignore it—consult your doctor.

Sources

- National Cancer Institute (NCI) | Male Breast Cancer
- National Cancer Institute (NCI) | NIH study confirms risk factors for male breast cancer
- Saudi National Cancer Center | Cancer Incidence Report 2024