

BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

**PROTECT
YOURSELF
FROM BREAST
CANCER**

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October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and it is also a timely reminder for us to look after our own bodies!

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among women in Singapore. Despite this, it is one of the most curable cancers when detected and treated in the early stages. Treatment strategies have improved significantly over the decades resulting in high cure rates and reduction in treatment side effects. Hence it is critical to understand what the early symptoms are.

Symptoms of Breast Cancer

- Painless breast lump
- Changes in size or shape of the breast
- Persistent skin changes such as redness, swelling, rash, dimpling, puckering or ulceration of the skin
- Nipple retracted inwards
- Persistent rash over the nipple
- Spontaneous nipple discharge that may be bloody or clear
- Unusual pain in same spot of the breast that does not go away
- Painless lump in the underarm area

Mild intermittent discomfort or pain of the breasts, especially occurring before the period and resolving after, is often related to benign fibrocystic change of the breasts and is usually not a significant symptom of breast cancer.

Consult your Doctor

If you have any of the above symptoms, your doctor may need to do further tests to rule out breast cancer or other conditions. Depending on your age, risk factors and outcome of clinical evaluation, your doctor may request for further tests such as mammogram and ultrasound.

If a suspicious abnormality is detected, a biopsy may be necessary for diagnosis. A variety of biopsy options are available and most of these are minimally invasive and can be performed under local anaesthesia as an outpatient or day surgery procedure.

Breast biopsy is the first step in confirming the diagnosis. Early detection of breast cancer gives the option of less extensive and disfiguring surgery in the treatment process, and early treatment also gives the best chance of cure from cancer.

Breast Cancer Treatment



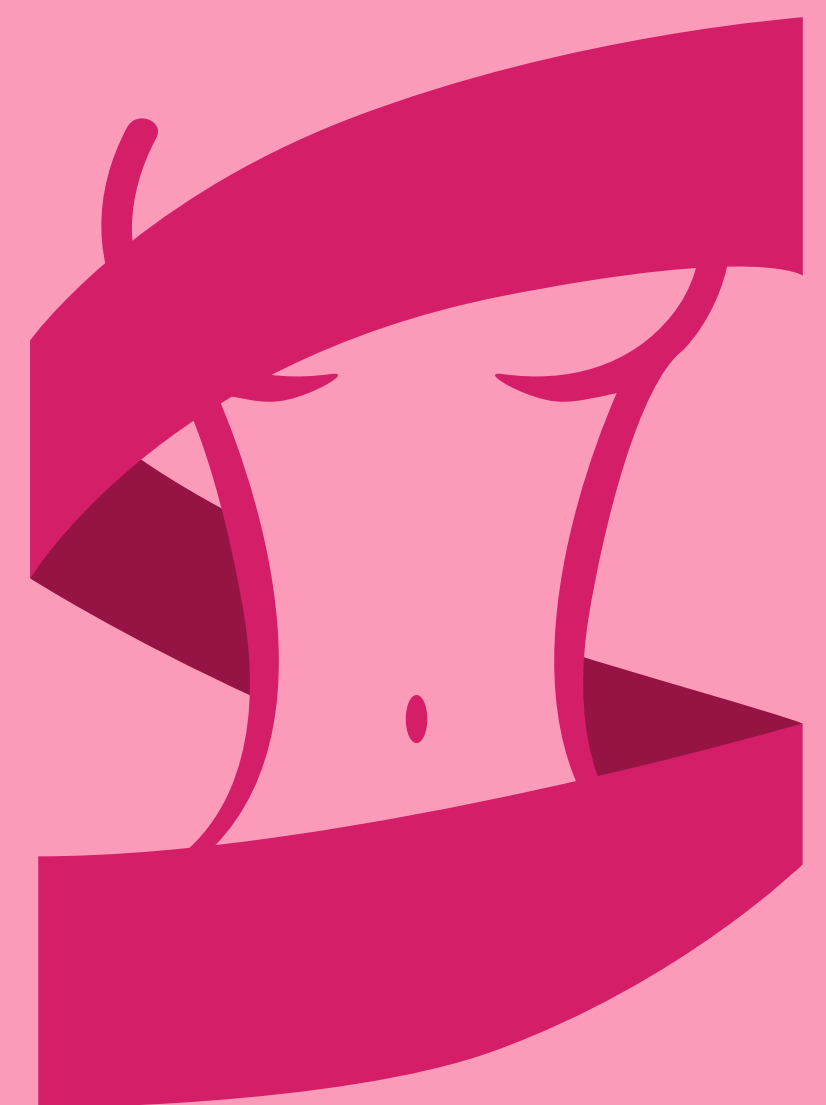
Treatment is multi-disciplinary and may involve a combination of several modalities including surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy and oral medication. There is no one-size fits all treatment strategy and each patient's treatment is individualized based on the type, extent and stage of cancer. In many cases of early breast cancer, the breast and lymph nodes may be conserved, reducing the long term side effects of surgery. In early non-aggressive cancers, chemotherapy may also be safely omitted if the genomic profile of the tumour is favourable.

Breast Cancer Screening

Women should remain breast-aware, and watch out for any significant symptoms or changes in the breasts. It is good practice to perform breast self examination about once a month.

For women above age 40, they should undergo mammogram screening once a year. Women with dense breasts should consider 3D mammogram screening and/or supplementary breast ultrasound.

For women above the age of 50, mammogram screening can be done once every 2 years. Women who have a history of breast diseases or a strong family history of breast cancer should consult their doctor regarding their appropriate screening interval and tests required.



Lifestyle Changes

In summary, breast cancer is highly treatable with very good outcomes when detected in early stages. Women should undergo regular breast screening and be aware of any abnormal findings in their own breasts. In addition, adopt these lifestyle changes to reduce your risk of breast cancer:

- Choose a healthy diet with plenty of fresh fruits, vegetables and lean meat. Reduce intake of fatty and oily foods, processed and red meats. Opt for whole grains instead of refined grains.
- Limit alcoholic drinks to not more than 1 drink a day.
- Engage in at least 30 minutes of exercise at least 5 days a week.
- Avoid excessive weight gain especially after menopause