Breast Cancer in Men

Breast cancer occurs when abnormal cells within the breast tissue begin to divide rapidly and uncontrollably. While most people think of breast cancer as a woman's disease, men can also develop breast cancer, because they also have breast tissue. Breast cancer is a rare problem in men.

CAUSES

The exact cause of breast cancer is not known. It is believed that breast cancer occurs due to many factors. Men are at a higher risk of developing breast cancer if they have:

- Other family members who have had breast cancer.
- Changes in certain genes (such as BRCA1 or BRCA2).
- A history of radiation exposure (such as, after treatment for another type of cancer).
- Higher than normal levels of the hormone estrogen in their bodies. This may be due to:
  - Unknown origins.
  - Treatment with estrogen-containing drugs.
  - Cirrhosis of the liver.
  - Being overweight (*obese*).
- Klinefelter's syndrome (*chromosome abnormality*).
- Large intake of alcohol.
- Abnormalities of the testicles:
  - Past history of mumps.
  - Undescended testicle.
  - Surgical removal of the testicles.
- Certain occupational exposures (not proven, but may be associated with male breast cancer). Such exposures may include:
  - High temperatures.
  - Gasoline fumes.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms can include:

- A lump or mass in the breast.
- Skin changes, such as puckering or dimpling.
- Nipple abnormalities, such as scaling, crustiness, excess redness, or pulling in (*retraction*).
- Nipple discharge, that may be bloody or clear.
- Bone pain.
- Weakness.
- Weight loss.
- Fevers.
- Severe tiredness (*fatigue*).

DIAGNOSIS

A physical exam involves:

- Carefully feeling the breast tissue, to find a mass.
- Feeling under both arms, to see if any of the lymph nodes are enlarged.
- Sampling nipple discharge. This may be sent to a lab for examination.

Imaging tests that are often used to diagnose breast cancer include:

- **Mammogram:** Uses radiation to produce a picture of the breast tissue.
- **Breast ultrasound:** Uses high-frequency sound waves to produce a detailed image of the breast tissue.

A biopsy removes a piece of breast or tumor tissue for examination in a lab. This can reveal the presence of cancer cells. Lymph nodes near the mass and in the armpit may also be removed, to see if the cancer has spread.

Types of biopsies include:

- **Fine needle aspiration:** A tiny, thin needle is used to remove a sample of tissue.

- **Core needle biopsy:** A larger, hollow needle removes a sample of tissue.
- **Excisional biopsy:** Surgery is used to remove the entire mass, as well as a rim of surrounding breast tissue.

TREATMENT

Treatment of breast cancer depends on many factors, including:

- Characteristics of the cancer cells.
- Tumor size.
- Whether the cancer has spread to lymph nodes or other locations (such as the bone).

The types of treatments used for breast cancer include:

- Surgery, to remove as much of the cancer as possible.
- Chemotherapy (*medicines*), to kill cancer cells.
- Radiation therapy, to kill cancer cells.
- Hormone therapy, to interfere with the growth of cancer cells.
- Targeted therapy, to interrupt chemical processes that the cancer cells need, in order to grow and divide.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Take medication as prescribed by your caregiver.
- Maintain a healthy diet.
- Consider joining a support group. This may help you learn to cope with the stress of having breast cancer.
- Seek advice to help you manage treatment side effects.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have a sudden increase in pain.
- You notice any new mass, in either breast or under your arm.
- You develop swelling in either arm or hand.
- You lose weight, without trying.
- You have an oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C), not controlled by medicine.
- You notice new fatigue or weakness.
- You develop chest pain and/or trouble breathing.
- You pass out (*faint*).

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