



BREAST CANCER PREVENTION AND SCREENING

Cancer Prevention Series 4

Breast cancer is a malignant tumour formed in the breast tissues. It occurs in both women and men, although breast cancer in men is rare.

Am I at risk of breast cancer?

Risk factors to breast cancer include:

- Lack of physical activity
- Alcohol consumption
- Obesity after menopause
- Advancing age
- No childbirth, late first live birth (after age of 30) or no breastfeeding
- Early menarche (before age of 12) or late menopause (after age of 55)
- History of breast cancer, ovarian cancer or endometrial cancer
- History of benign breast conditions or lobular carcinoma *in situ*
- Receiving hormonal replacement therapy
- Using combined oral contraceptives

In addition, women with the following risk factors are at **increased risk** of breast cancer:

- Family history of breast cancer or ovarian cancer, especially with first-degree relatives (mother, sister or daughter) diagnosed with breast cancer before age of 50
- Carrier (or family history) of certain gene (e.g. *BRCA1* or *BRCA2*) mutations confirmed by genetic testing
- History of receiving radiation therapy to the chest before age of 30



What are the common symptoms of breast cancer?

The symptoms of breast cancer may not be easily noticed at an early stage.

Common symptoms include:

- Breast lump
- A change in the size or shape of the breast
- A change in skin texture of the breast or nipple
- Rash around the nipple
- In-drawing of the nipple
- Discharge from the nipple
- New and persistent discomfort or pain in the breast or armpit
- A new lump or thickening in the armpit

You should see a doctor as soon as possible if you develop any of the above symptoms.

How to reduce the chance of getting breast cancer?

- Have regular physical activities
- Avoid alcohol drinking
- Maintain a healthy body weight and waist circumference
- Have childbirth at an earlier age and breastfeed each child for longer duration

Why should I be breast aware?

Every woman should be breast aware. Women need to be familiar with the normal look, feel and cyclical changes of their breasts. If woman spot any irregular change in their breasts, they should see a doctor as soon as possible.

What is breast cancer screening?

The purpose of breast cancer screening is to detect breast cancer before it gives rise to symptoms, so that early treatment can be initiated. Mammography is widely used as a screening tool and it is an X-ray examination of the breasts. In general, mammography screening is safe.



Should I get screened?

At present, there is insufficient scientific evidence to recommend for or against population-based mammography for general female in Hong Kong. All screening tests have their limitations and they are not 100% accurate. Women considering breast cancer screening should seek advice from doctors for assessment of need and obtain full information on potential benefits and risks of having the screening test for an informed choice.

Women at **increased risk** of breast cancer (e.g. being a carrier of certain gene mutations such as *BRCA1/2*, with family history of breast cancer or ovarian cancer, history of receiving radiation therapy to the chest before age of 30, etc.) should seek advice from doctors about whether they should receive breast cancer screening, starting age, suitable screening test and the frequency of screening.



Department of Health