

### Screening for Cancer

A periodic health check is a woman's best bet against Cancer. Regular screening tests can detect cancer right in the beginning and intercepting the cancer early, means a more effective cure and a higher survival rate. The tests are as follows:

**Mammograms** - breast examinations to detect lumps and tumors early on.

**The Pap smear** - also called Pap test, is the most effective advance warning in cases of cervical cancer.

**Annual pelvic examinations** - where the doctor feels the internal sex organs, bladder and rectum for abnormalities - can help spot endometrial cancer.

### Treatment

The method of treatment depends on the stage the cancer is in. However, every method has its side effects. Therefore, the choice of what treatment is to be used should be a judicious one. It is best if the patient discusses the course of treatment and associated side effects with the doctor before making a choice. The types of treatment are:

1. Surgery
2. Radiation therapy - Also known as radiotherapy.
3. Chemotherapy
4. Hormone therapy
5. Biological therapy - Also called immunotherapy.

### Prevention

**Prevention is possible at two levels: primary and secondary.** Primary level prevention is best characterized by the age old adage "**Prevention is better than cure**". This simply means, taking necessary precautions to avoid cancer. In secondary level prevention, mainly applicable to uterine-cervical and breast cancers, the spread of cancer can be controlled after early detection.

Some of the cancers that can be prevented at the primary level are oral cancer, lung cancer, and uterine and cervical cancers.

### To avoid cancer:

- Don't smoke cigarettes. Avoid passive smoking, too. Cigarette smoking can cause lung cancer, besides heart disease, stomach ulcers, frequent colds and chronic bronchitis. Don't chew tobacco.
- Avoid alcohol. A woman who takes alcohol drinks increases her risk of breast cancer by more than 50 per cent.
- Take diet include foods low in fat and calories to keep your body in shape. Include fresh fruits, vegetables, sprouts, whole grains, whole grain breads and cereals in your daily diet.
- Exercise at least four hours a week. It need not be strenuous activity. Brisk walking is recommended. Being overweight is a risk factor for breast and uterine cancers.
- Excessive intake of fried foods, fat, preserved meat and burnt food could cause cancer.
- Avoid using heated oil over and over again for cooking. Also avoid artificial sweeteners and coloring agents in food. Clean vegetables and fruits thoroughly before use to remove pesticides.
- Personal hygiene is important. Especially oral hygiene, cleanliness of skin and genital hygiene.
- Early marriages and multiple pregnancies can lead to cancer of the uterus. Late first pregnancy may lead to cancer of the uterus or cervix.
- Avoid multiple sex partners.
- Avoid indiscriminate use of drugs. Always check with your doctor before taking medicines.
- Avoid too much sunlight, particularly if you are fair skinned. Wear protective clothing or use effective sun-screens.

### Role of food in fighting Cancer

Creating 'good food habits' could be one of the easiest ways of fighting cancer. Oncologists and researchers have accepted the role that 'right food' can play, not only in regressing the advance of cancer but also in preventing it from occurring.

Dietary changes can also lower the risk for specific cancers.

Up to 50 per cent of breast cancers, 33 per cent of lung cancers and 75 per cent of colon and rectal cancers can be avoided by following specific diets. Here's what you should be eating.

**Onions, garlic, cabbage, cauliflower, fish, liver, seafood, milk, yogurt, curd, egg yolk, green leafy vegetables, wholegrain cereals, tomato, turnip, ginger, apple, grape and orange** contain *cancer fighting agents*.



**Avoid Consumption of red meat-beef, pork, lamb and fat contained food could increase the risk of cancer, especially colorectal, pancreatic, breast, colon and renal cancers.**

### Do it yourself

#### Monthly breast self-exam

- 1 Stand before a mirror. Inspect both breasts for anything unusual, such as any discharge from the nipples, puckering, dimpling, or scaling of the skin.
- 2 Watching closely in the mirror, clasp hands behind your head and press hands forward.
- 3 Next, press hands firmly on hips and bow slightly toward your mirror as you pull your shoulders and elbows forward.
- 4 Raise your left arm. Use three or four fingers of your right hand to explore your left breast firmly, carefully, and thoroughly. Beginning at the outer edge, press the flat part of your fingers in small circles, moving the circles slowly around the breast. Gradually work toward the nipple. Be sure to cover the entire breast. Pay special attention to the area between the breast and the armpit, including the armpit itself. Feel for any unusual lump or mass under the skin. Repeat the exam on your right breast.
- 5 Gently squeeze each nipple and look for a discharge.
- 6 Steps 4 and 5 should be repeated lying down. Lie flat on your back, right arm over your head and a pillow or folded towel under your left shoulder. This position flattens the breast and makes it easier to examine. Use the same circular motion described earlier. Repeat on your right breast.

*The next two steps are designed to emphasize any change in the shape or contour of your breasts. You should be able to feel your chest muscles tighten while doing these steps.*

*Some women do steps 4 and 5 in the shower. Fingers glide over soapy skin, making it easy to concentrate on the texture underneath.*



# Women and CANCER



## Protect Yourself from Cancer

Published by the Department of Health CTA

Funded by PRM via Tibet Fund





### What is Cancer?

Cancer, in simple terms, occurs when cells divide in an uncontrolled manner. *Cells* are the smallest units of a human body. Normally, cells divide and produce the exact number of cells required - only when the body needs more cells. In cancer, however, cells divide for no apparent reason. In time, they form a mass of extra tissue and become big enough to be noticed as a growth or tumor. A tumor can be *benign* which is harmless and doesn't spread but *malignant* tumors grow into the surrounding tissue in a process called invasion. Cancer cells also break away from a malignant tumor and enter the blood stream or lymphatic system. This is how cancer spreads from the original tumor to other tissues and organs causing diseases and death.

### What causes Cancer?

Though the exact cause is unknown, there are various theories on what could lead to the condition. The viral theory says that a cell becomes cancerous when infected by a virus. The immunological theory says that an abnormal cell survives to become a cancer because the body's defenses somehow break down. The chemical theory rests on the evidence from animal tests that certain chemicals cause cancer by altering the genetic make-up of a cell. These are known as carcinogens; tobacco smoke is one. Cancer has many causes, some of which are still unknown.

### Warning signals of Cancer in Women

- Unusual bleeding or discharge. Blood in the vaginal discharge or bleeding after intercourse.
- A lump in the breast or elsewhere.
- A sore that does not heal.
- Changes in bowel or bladder habits.
- Hoarseness or cough.
- Indigestion or difficulty in swallowing.
- Change in the size of a birthmark or mole

### Different types of Cancer in Women

Women who are aged between 20 and 40 years should make it necessary to get themselves checked for cancer every three years apart from regular easy-to-do home examinations to stay alert to warning signs of cancer. *For cancer, be it of the breast or the uterus, can be cured if detected early enough.*

Some cancers that are common in women besides breast cancer and cancer of the reproductive system are:

Leukemia  
Oral Cancer  
Esophageal Cancer  
Lymphoma

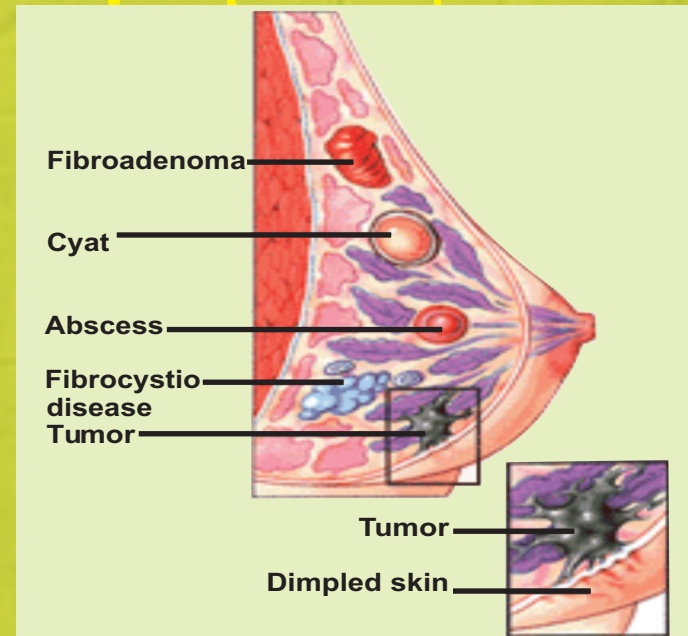
### Breast Cancer

Breast Cancer, which is the *second* most common cancer makes up for almost nine per cent of all new cancer cases in India. It occurs when cells of the breast grow and multiply in an uncontrolled manner. Risk factors of Breast Cancer are:

**Age:** The risk of breast cancer increases with age; a 70-year-old woman is more likely to get breast cancer than a 40-year-old. Therefore, it is important that all women above 50 undergo regular breast mammograms.

**Family history:** Family history is an important risk factor for breast cancer. In families with a bad gene for breast cancer, around half of the female members develop the cancer, usually before 40 years of age.

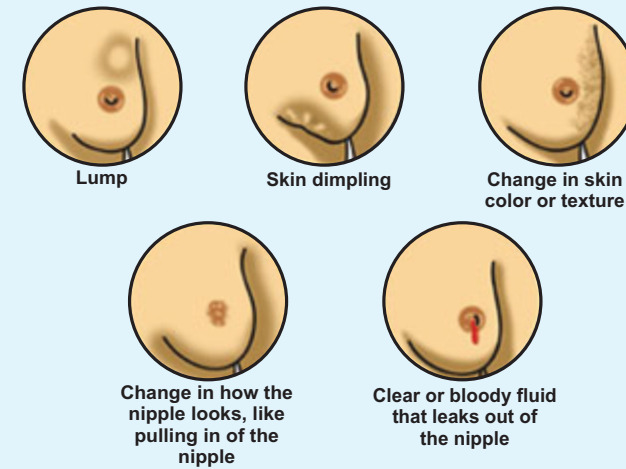
**Reproductive factors:** A woman who has had her first child before the age of 23 has one-third the risk of breast cancer compared with a woman who has her first baby at 30. Breast-feeding for at least three months has a protective effect.



### How often should a Woman have Check-ups?

1. From age 35 self-examine your breasts once every month.
  2. From 40, continue self-examinations and have your doctor examine your breasts once a year.
  3. From age 50, get a mammogram done every two years.
- In addition, continue self-examination and check-ups by the doctor.

### ILLUSTRATION OF SYMPTOMS OF BREAST CANCER



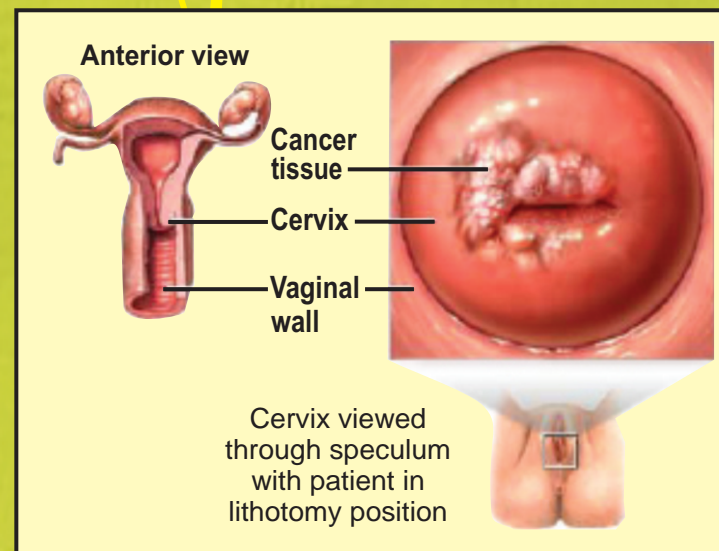
### Cancer of the Cervix, Uterus & Ovary

Cancers can hit the uterus and the ovaries. Uterine cancer is of two types: *cervical* and *endometrial* cancer.

**Cervical cancer:** Cervical cancer occurs in the cervix, the canal between the vagina and the uterus. This is the most common cancer among Indian women.

You are more likely to be affected if you:

- \* Have had sexual encounters at an early age
- \* Have multiple sexual partners
- \* Have poor genital hygiene



### Watch out for:

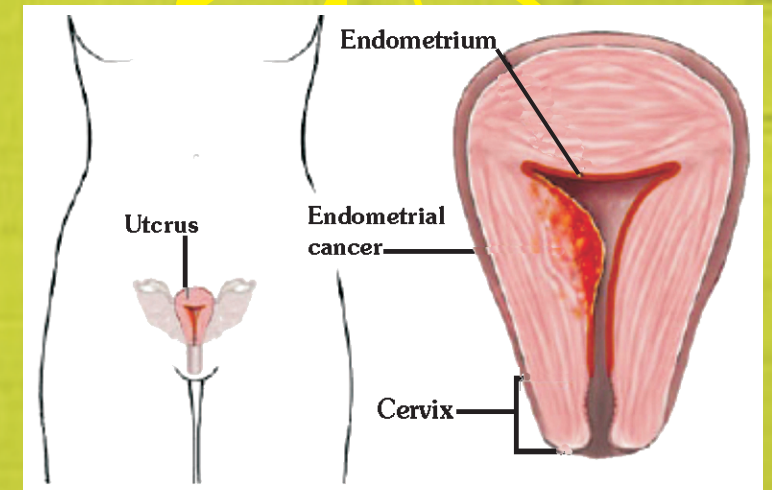
- \* Blood in vaginal discharge
- \* Unusual bleeding between periods
- \* Unusual bleeding after intercourse

### Precautions:

The Pap test detects signs of cervical cancer early on. Have a Pap test every year if you are:

- \* Over 18
  - \* Sexually active
- Get HPV Vaccine.

**Endometrial Cancer:** Endometrial Cancer occurs within the uterus. Usually occurs among older women and is influenced by genetic predisposition to the disease.



### You are more likely to be affected if you:

- \* Are over 40
- \* Are overweight
- \* Take hormones
- \* Are infertile
- \* Do not ovulate

### Watch out for:

- \* Blood in vaginal discharge
- \* Abnormal bleeding - bleeding other than menstrual flow

**Ovarian cancer:** Ovarian cancer occurs in the ovaries, which produces the ova or eggs. This type of cancer is common among older women.

### Watch out for:

- \* Discomfort in the lower abdomen
- \* Swelling of the abdomen
- \* Loss of weight
- \* Back ache
- \* Occasional breathlessness