

# Breast Cancer Fact Sheet

## FACTS ABOUT BREAST CANCER IN THE USA FROM THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE OF BREAST CANCER ORGANIZATIONS

- Excluding cancers of the skin, breast cancer is the most common form of cancer in women in the United States. Both its cause and the means for its cure remain undiscovered. Over two million breast cancer survivors are alive in the U.S. today.
- In 2002, 203,500 new cases of female invasive breast cancer will be diagnosed, and 39,600 women will die from the disease. Nearly 54,300 cases of female in situ (pre-invasive)) breast cancer will be diagnosed in 2002. Of these, approximately 88 percent will be ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS). Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death for all women (after lung cancer), and the leading overall cause of cancer death in women between the ages of 40 and 59.
- Men can develop breast cancer too, although its incidence is low. In 2002, 1,500 male cases are projected to be diagnosed and 400 men will die from the disease.
- Based on the current life expectancy for women in the United States, 1 out of 9 women will develop breast cancer in her lifetime – a risk that was 1 out of 14 in 1960. This year, breast cancer will be newly diagnosed every 3 minutes, and a woman will die from breast cancer every 13 minutes.
- Every woman is at risk for breast cancer. The risk of developing breast cancer increases as a woman ages, if she has personal or family history of breast cancer, has never had children or had her first child after age 30 and if she has had prior treatment with radiation therapy for Hodgkin's disease. However, over 70% of cases occur in women who have no identifiable risk factors.
- Breast cancer cannot yet be prevented. However, there is now a risk reduction option available for women at very high risk, such as the estimated 5 to 10% of American women with multiple close blood relatives who have had the disease. In 1998, the drug tamoxifen was shown to reduce breast cancer cases by 50% over four years in a large research study of high-risk women. Tamoxifen is FDA-approved for use in this high-risk group; however, the drug's benefits, risks and side effects vary for each woman, and must be thoroughly discussed with an expert physician.

- Breast cancer can be detected at an early, treatable stage in women age 40 and older. More widespread use of regular screening mammography has been a major contributor to recent improvements in the breast cancer survival rate. A 2000 survey showed that on average, 63% of U.S. women age 40 and older had received a recent mammogram. A screening mammogram is a simple low-dose x-ray procedure that can reveal breast cancer at its earliest stage, up to two years before it is large enough to be felt. In NABCO's view, annual screening mammography should begin at age 40 and continue as long as a woman is healthy and able to undergo the test.
- Annual breast examinations by a medical professional are a required complement to annual screening mammography. Although mammography is now the most frequent means of discovering breast cancer, lumps and breast irregularities are often found by women themselves, yet most women have not been instructed in breast self-examination (BSE), and do not perform it regularly. Although BSE has not been demonstrated to affect breast cancer survival, a recommended component of every woman's breast health program is to become familiar with her breasts and what "normal" feels like to her.
- In the United States, over 80% of biopsied breast abnormalities are proven benign, but any breast lump must be evaluated by a physician. New, less invasive biopsy procedures (such as stereotactic core needle biopsy) permit removal and evaluation of breast tissue in a surgeon's or radiologist's office and require no special preparation or recovery period.
- If detected early, breast cancer can be treated effectively with surgery that preserves the breast, followed by radiation therapy. This local therapy is often accompanied by systemic chemotherapy and /hormonal therapy. Currently, 63% of breast cancers are discovered at an early, "localized" stage, and five-year survival after treatment for early-stage breast cancer is 96%.
- Breast cancer incidence increases with age, rising sharply after age 40. About 77% of invasive breast cancers occur in women over age 50. Average age at diagnosis is 64.

Information provided by the National Alliance of Breast Cancer Organizations (NABCO)

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