



Frequently Asked Questions Booklet about **Screening and Breast Cancer**



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Preface

Life is often filled with responsibilities and daily demands that consume much of our time and energy. Yet, in the middle of it all, your health remains what truly matters. Taking care of yourself is not a luxury—it is a priority. It gives you the strength to keep going, both for yourself and for those you love.

Breast cancer is one of the most common cancers among women, but here is the good news: early detection can greatly increase the chances of recovery. Having the right knowledge, and knowing how to separate facts from myths, can make a real difference in your health journey.

This booklet has been designed in a simple FAQ format, bringing you clear and straightforward answers to the questions you may have: how to reduce your risk, when and how to get screened, what to do if symptoms appear, and what treatment options are available. It also helps correct some common misconceptions along the way.

Our goal is for this booklet to be a supportive companion - easy to read, practical, and encourages you to focus on what truly matters: your health. Every step you take toward awareness and early detection is a step toward protecting yourself and those you care about.

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General Information

What is breast cancer?

Breast cancer is a disease where cells in the breast grow uncontrollably and form a tumor. If not detected and treated early, it can spread to other parts

How common is breast cancer in women?

It is the most common cancer in women worldwide. About 1 in 12 women will develop it during their lifetime. of the body.

Can men get breast cancer too?

Yes, although rare. Men have breast tissue, and about 1 in 100 breast cancer cases occur in men.

What types of breast cancer exist?

The most common are ductal carcinoma (starts in milk ducts) and lobular carcinoma (starts in milk-producing glands). There are also other less common types.

What is the difference between benign and malignant breast lumps?

Benign lumps are non-cancerous and usually not dangerous. Malignant lumps are cancerous and require treatment.



Risk Factors

What are the main risk factors for developing breast cancer?

The risk of developing breast cancer increases in females, with advancing age, and in the presence of a family history of the disease. High breast tissue density, obesity, alcohol consumption, smoking, and lack of physical exercise are all factors that may contribute to changes in the cells that could lead to breast cancer.

Does having a family history of breast cancer increase my risk?

Yes. If a close relative (mother, sister, daughter) had breast cancer, your risk is higher.

How does age affect breast cancer risk?

Risk increases with age, especially after 40.

Can lifestyle factors like diet, exercise, and alcohol influence risk?

Yes. A healthy lifestyle lowers risk, while consuming alcohol, smoking, and obesity increase it.

Does breastfeeding lower breast cancer risk?

Yes. Breastfeeding for several months can reduce the risk. In addition, the benefit is accumulative. The more children a woman breastfeeds for a year the higher the benefit.

Signs & Symptoms

What are the warning signs of breast cancer?

A woman may feel an unusual lump in the breast or under the armpit, or notice changes in the size or shape of the breast or the nipple. There may also be dimpling or indentation in the skin covering the breast, or unusual nipple discharge.

Does a lump in the breast always mean cancer?

No. Most lumps are benign and do not cause problems, but they should always be checked and their nature confirmed by a doctor.

Can breast pain be a sign of cancer?

Breast pain is usually not cancer. However, persistent or unusual pain should be checked, especially if it is associated with other symptoms.

What changes in the breast should I not ignore?

The appearance of a lump in the breast or under the armpit, redness, swelling, inward pulling of the nipple, or skin changes that make it look like an orange peel.

Is nipple discharge always concerning?

Not always. Clear or milky discharge may be harmless, especially if there is an elevated level of the milk hormone (prolactin) in the woman, as diagnosed by a doctor. However, new or persistent discharge, or discharge that contains blood, should be examined and evaluated.

General Knowledge about Screening

What is breast cancer screening?

Screening is testing healthy women with no symptoms to find breast cancer early, when it's most treatable.

Why is screening important?

Early detection helps discover cancer before it causes any symptoms, allowing for early treatment and increasing the survival rate.

At what age should women start screening?

The Department of Health Standard for Breast Cancer Screening in Abu Dhabi recommends starting clinical breast exams at age of 20 and mammograms at age 40. Women at higher risk undergo additional screenings.

Do younger women need breast screening?

The Department of Health Standard for Breast Cancer Screening in Abu Dhabi recommends starting at 20 through 39 by attending clinical breast exams every 3 years. Women who have strong family history or genetic risk attend additional screenings.

Should men undergo breast screening?

No routine screening is needed for men, except those with very high genetic risk (e.g., BRCA* mutations).

*BRCA: BReast CAncer genes

Can screening prevent breast cancer?

No. Screening does not prevent cancer - it helps detect it early, making treatment more effective.

Screening Methods

What is a mammogram?

A mammogram is an X-ray of the breast that can detect lumps or changes too small to feel.

How does a mammogram work?

The breast is gently compressed between two plates to take clear X-ray images from different angles.

What is the difference between a routine screening mammogram and a diagnostic mammogram?

Screening mammograms are routine checks for women without symptoms. Diagnostic mammograms are more detailed and done if there is a symptom or abnormal result.

Are ultrasound and MRI* also used for breast screening?

Yes. Doctors sometimes order breast ultrasound (sonar) for women with dense breasts. MRI* is used for women at very high risk (e.g., genetic mutations).

*MRI: Magnetic resonance imaging

Can mammograms cause cancer?

Mammograms use a very small amount of radiation. A typical mammogram delivers about 0.4 mSv, roughly equivalent to several weeks of natural background radiation.

Are mammograms too painful?

Compression may feel uncomfortable, but it lasts only a few seconds. It is important because it helps spread the breast tissue and keeps it still, allowing clearer, higher-quality images. Modern mammogram machines are designed to use the lowest amount of radiation needed to produce high-quality images.



Guidelines & Frequency

How often should I get a mammogram?

Women should get one every 2 years starting at age 40.

Do screening guidelines differ by country?

Yes. Some countries recommend starting at 40, others at 45 or 50. In Abu Dhabi, screening via mammography starts at 40.

If I have a family history of breast cancer, should I start earlier?

Yes. You may need to start routine screenings 5–10 years earlier than the age your relative was diagnosed at.

Do women with genetic mutations (like BRCA*) need different screening?

Yes. They may need earlier, more frequent screening and sometimes MRI* in addition to mammography.

*MRI: Magnetic resonance imaging; BRCA: BRCA1/2 Cancer genes

Can women over 70 stop screening?

Not always. Screening guidelines in Abu Dhabi recommend mammography for women between 40 and 75.

Do self-exams replace professional screening? And how often should they be done?

No. Self-exams are helpful for awareness, but they do not replace mammograms or clinical exams. For women still menstruating, a breast self-exam should be performed a few days after her period ends. For those who are post-menopausal, a breast self-exam should be performed on the same day of each month, such as the 1st or 15th day of the month.

What should I do if I missed my regular screening?

Book the next available appointment as soon as possible. Delays happen, but it's important to get back on track, and check what really matters.

Safety & Accuracy

Is mammography safe?

Yes. It uses a very low dose of radiation, well within safe limits.

Does mammography expose me to harmful radiation?

Radiation is minimal—about the same as a few weeks of natural background radiation. The benefits outweigh the risks.

How accurate is mammography in detecting cancer?

It detects about 80–90% of breast cancers. Accuracy improves when combined with other imaging for high-risk women.

What are false positives and false negatives in screening?

False positive: When the test result indicates that it is “abnormal,” but in fact there is no cancer.

False negative: When the test result indicates that it is “normal,” but in fact there is cancer that was not detected.

Why do some women need additional tests after a mammogram?

Sometimes the images are unclear, or doctors need more detail. Most follow-ups do not result in a cancer diagnosis.

Practical & Emotional Concerns

How should I prepare for a mammogram?

Avoid deodorant, lotion, or powder under the arms or chest on the day—it can interfere with images.

Can I get a mammogram while pregnant or breastfeeding?

It's usually postponed unless absolutely necessary. Ultrasound (sonar) is preferred in these cases.

Does breast density affect screening results?

Yes. Dense breast tissue can make mammograms harder to read, so ultrasound or MRI may be recommended.

How soon will I get my results?

Typically within 1–2 weeks. Some centers provide results in less than a week.

How do I deal with anxiety while waiting for screening results?

It's normal to feel anxious. Talking to your doctor, practicing relaxation techniques, and remembering that most results are normal may help.

Access & Coverage

Is breast screening free or covered by insurance?

The screening is covered by Thiqa insurance scheme and some other insurance plans. Speak with your insurance provider to check coverage. There are many providers that offer mammography screening at a discounted rates as well. During October, the month of Breast Cancer Awareness, some providers also offer free screening. Follow our social media channels @adphc_ae for more information.

Where can I go for breast cancer screening?

IFHAS network of providers and most primary care clinics and hospitals in Abu Dhabi offer breast cancer screening.

Ask your GP or family doctor.



- Diagnosis -

How is breast cancer diagnosed?

Through imaging (mammogram, ultrasound, MRI) and confirmed with a biopsy.

What is the role of biopsy in diagnosis?

A biopsy removes a small sample of tissue to check under a microscope if cancer is present.

How do doctors determine the stage of breast cancer?

By checking tumor size, whether lymph nodes are involved, and if cancer has spread to other parts of the body.

What is hormone receptor status (ER/PR, HER2) and why is it important?

It shows whether the cancer grows due to hormones or proteins. This helps guide treatment.

How long does it usually take to get results?

Imaging results may come in a few days, while biopsy results usually take around 10 days.

- Treatment & Care -

What are the common treatment options for breast cancer?

There are several treatments, which may include surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, hormone therapy, immunotherapy, and targeted therapy.

Will I need surgery if diagnosed?

Most patients need surgery, either to remove the tumor (lumpectomy) or the whole breast (mastectomy).

What is the difference between lumpectomy and mastectomy?

In a lumpectomy, only the cancerous lump and some of the surrounding tissue are removed. In a mastectomy, the entire breast is removed.

How do chemotherapy and radiotherapy work?

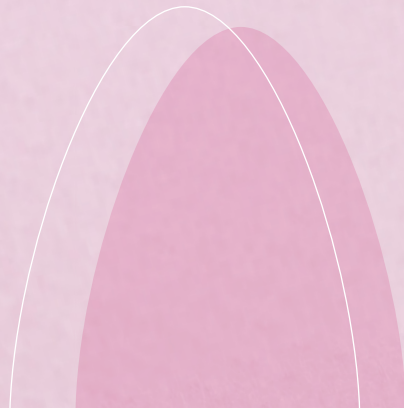
Chemotherapy uses medicine to kill cancer cells throughout the body. Radiotherapy uses high-energy rays to target and destroy cancer cells locally.

Can breast cancer be treated without losing the breast?

Yes. In many cases, breast-conserving surgery plus radiotherapy is possible.

What kind of support is available for patients and families?

Counseling, support groups, nutrition advice, and rehabilitation services are available.



What are the chances of breast cancer recurrence?

The likelihood of recurrence depends on the stage and type of the cancer and the treatment, but regular follow-up helps detect it at an early stage if it occurs again.

What is the survival rate for breast cancer today?

If detected early, survival rates are very high (over 90% for localized cancer- that has not spread).

Can I continue working during treatment?

Many people continue working, but treatment side effects may require rest or flexible schedules.

How does breast cancer affect fertility?

Some treatments can affect fertility. Women planning for children should discuss options with their doctor before treatment.



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So does putting your health first

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Regular screening from age 40
helps detect breast cancer early

Book your breast cancer
screening appointment today

