

Breast cancer awareness



1 in 7 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime.¹



On average **50 women per day** are diagnosed.¹

8 women die from breast cancer every day.¹



The **five-year survival rate** has increased to 91%.¹



What is it?

There are more than 200,000 people living with breast cancer in Australia.⁵ It occurs mainly in women but it's important to know that men can be diagnosed too (around 160 men are diagnosed annually).²

As with other types of cancer, breast cancer happens when cells grow abnormally. In this case the abnormal cells originate in the breast and can grow into a tumour. Tumours can either be non-invasive or invasive.³ Non-invasive varieties are contained to the milk ducts or lobules but may become invasive over time. Invasive means the cancer has spread from the lobules and travelled to the lymph nodes or other parts of the body.³

Breast cancer is described in terms of stage.⁴ The stage assigned is based on the size and scale of the tumour and is used to inform treatment decisions. Stage 0 is known as pre-invasive breast cancer; Stage I and II are referred to as early breast cancer; Stage III is locally advanced breast cancer; and Stage IV is

metastatic, or advanced, breast cancer. If contained to the breast, survival rates are high but drop considerably if the cancer spreads beyond the breast.

Warning signs

The symptoms of breast cancer may differ across individuals and will depend on where the tumour is located, the size and how quickly it is growing. Early detection helps to give the best chance of survival.

Breast changes that should be investigated further with a doctor include: a new lump or lumpiness, change in breast shape/size, red or sore nipples, nipple discharge, redness or dimpling in the skin of the breast or persistent pain.⁵

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It's important to remember there are other conditions that may cause these symptoms, it may not be breast cancer. Symptoms for metastatic breast cancer are more diverse and depend on where the cancer has spread in the body.

For anyone previously diagnosed with breast cancer, any new health concerns or symptoms should be discussed with your health practitioner.

Various methods can be used to detect breast cancer including clinical examination, mammogram, Magnetic Resonance Imaging (**MRI**), ultrasound and biopsy.⁵

Risk factors

There are many risk factors for breast cancer. Some risk factors can be influenced by lifestyle choice but there are others we have no control over.

Non-modifiable risk factors: Gender and age are two well-known risk factors. While men can develop breast cancer, 99% of cases occur in women and 75% are attributed to women aged 50 years or older.⁶ The average age of diagnosis

is 61 years. In some cases, family history can play a role particularly if numerous blood relatives have had breast cancer. There is a higher genetic risk for women who carry a variation in the BRCA1 or BRCA2 genes. Other known risk factors include early puberty and late menopause.⁶

Modifiable risk factors: There is an association between alcohol and the risk of developing breast cancer. The risk rises as the number of drinks consumed increases.⁶ Having a healthy, stable weight is important, particularly for postmenopausal women. It's no surprise therefore that regular exercise can help reduce the risk of breast cancer. Smoking is another lifestyle factor linked to breast cancer.⁶

Protect yourself: Minimise risk

- The first step to protect yourself against breast cancer is to understand your risk factors. Consider your lifestyle and any positive changes you can make to reduce your risk.
- Early detection saves lives. Women should be breast aware and do regular self-checks.
- A free routine screening service is available for women aged 50-74 years old through BreastScreen Australia. Screening is also available for younger age groups if requested. Genetic testing is available in relation to the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes.
- Knowing your risk, consider whether you have adequate insurance (e.g., life, trauma, total & permanent disability, income protection) to protect what you value most in life.

1. <https://nbcf.org.au/about-breast-cancer/breast-cancer-stats/>

2. <https://breast-cancer.canceraustralia.gov.au/statistics>

3. <https://nbcf.org.au/about-breast-cancer/diagnosis/types-of-breast-cancer/>

4. <https://nbcf.org.au/about-breast-cancer/diagnosis/stages-of-breast-cancer/>

5. <https://nbcf.org.au/about-breast-cancer/detection-and-awareness/detection/>

6. <https://nbcf.org.au/about-breast-cancer/prevention-and-risk/>

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