



Top 10 breast cancer myths

Overview

Over the past few decades, the news about breast cancer has been increasingly hopeful. But, despite widespread public awareness, research efforts and improved survival rates, half-truths and false controversies continue to drive many women's fears about the disease. The best way to combat these fears is to better understand what breast cancer really is and is not.

The facts

Besides skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common cancer affecting women in the United States (U.S.). It's also the second leading cause of cancer-related death in women, after lung cancer.

About one in eight American women — 12 out of every 100 — will develop breast cancer over the course of her lifetime. So, it's more correct to say that one in eight women who reach the age of 80 can expect to get breast cancer. For most women, the risk of getting the disease is actually lower than 12% with each decade of life.

While breast cancer remains a serious threat to women's health, there were approximately 2.6 million breast cancer survivors in the U.S. as of 2011.



The myths

Myth #1: If you find a lump in your breast, you must have cancer.

A small percentage of breast lumps turn out to be malignant or cancerous. Eighty to 85% of the time, these lumps are cysts or noncancerous tumors. But, it's still very important not to ignore lumps and have them checked out by your doctor.

Myth #2: A mammogram can cause breast cancer to spread.

Mammograms, or X-rays of the breast, use very small doses of radiation and cannot cause the spread of cancer. What they can do is help with cancer detection, which allows for earlier treatment and better outcomes. In fact, mammograms have been shown to improve survival rates by 35% in women over the age 50. Today, the standard screening recommendation is for women to get annual mammograms starting at age 40. If you have dense breasts or are under age 50, ask your doctor about getting a digital mammogram. Also, remember to give yourself regular breast self-exams and get annual breast exams from your doctor after the age of 40.

Myth #3: A family history of breast cancer means you'll get it, too.

While a hereditary link to breast cancer does place you in a higher risk group, only about 10% of women who are diagnosed have a family history of the disease. Still, consult your doctor about whether you should start getting screened at a younger age or more often based on family history.

Myth #4: If the gene mutation BRCA1 or BRCA2 is found in your DNA, you will develop breast cancer.

Not everyone who carries one of these mutations will get breast cancer. But, a woman who has inherited a BRCA1 or BRCA2 mutation is about five times more likely to develop the disease than a woman who does not have the mutation. If you are a carrier, talk to your doctor about various proactive treatments, such as hormonal therapy or surgical prevention (e.g., a bilateral prophylactic mastectomy).

Myth #5: Having a smaller chest lowers your risk for breast cancer.

With breast cancer, size doesn't matter. The cancer develops in the cells lining the breast ducts and lobules, where milk is produced and carried to the nipple. All women have the same amount of these cells.

Myth #6: Breast cancer is strictly a woman's disease.

Actually, men get it, too. Annually, about 2,190 men are diagnosed with breast cancer and 410 will die. Men even tend to have higher mortality rates than women because they don't know they're at risk and get help too late. Men should also do breast self-exams in the shower and share anything unusual with their doctors.

Myth #7: You can prevent breast cancer.

Since we don't really know what causes it, there's no sure way to prevent breast cancer. But, there are some risk factors, like obesity, poor diet, smoking, alcohol use and an inactive lifestyle, which you can avoid. Plus, with regular check-ups and mammograms, you can increase your odds for early detection and survival.

Myth #8: Young women don't have to worry about breast cancer.

Sadly, cases of metastatic breast cancer have been rising slightly for women ages 25 to 39. While most breast cancer affects women after age 40, young women are still at risk. Breast cancer in younger women tends to be more aggressive and harder to treat. And because routine screening isn't recommended until 40, young women are less likely to benefit from early detection.

Myth #9: Antiperspirants and deodorants can cause breast cancer.

No link has been found between using antiperspirants/deodorants and breast cancer.

Myth #10: Wearing an underwire or regular bra can increase your risk of breast cancer.

No link has been found between wearing bras and breast cancer.

For more information about breast cancer, talk with your doctor or visit empireblue.com. Also, check out the following sites:

National Cancer Institute: cancer.gov

American Cancer Society: cancer.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: cdc.gov

Breastcancer.org: breastcancer.org



Sources
National Breast Cancer Foundation: nationalbreastcancer.org
American Cancer Society: cancer.org
Breastcancer.org: breastcancer.org

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