

Facts About Breast Cancer

Breast cancer is the most common type of solid tumor in American women, with more than 200,000 women diagnosed annually. More than 80 percent of all breast cancer diagnosed in the USA is curable.

Risk Factors for Breast Cancer

Many women who develop breast cancer do not have known risk factors. However, the American Cancer Society lists the following characteristics as risk factors:

- Increasing age
- Family history of breast cancer
- Early onset of menstrual periods (menarche)
- Having children later in life, or not at all (delayed gestation)
- Hormone replacement therapy with estrogen and progesterone

Exercise, lean body mass, limiting alcohol intake, and having normal Vitamin D levels may be protective.

Diagnosing Breast Cancer

Many breast tumors are found by screening mammograms. If you have a family history of the disease or other risk factors, ask your healthcare provider about screening at earlier ages. If a lesion is suspicious by physical exam or by mammogram, your doctor may recommend additional tests such as biopsy, breast ultrasound, and breast MRI.

Treating Breast Cancer

The main treatment for breast cancer is surgery. This is often followed by radiation therapy after a routine lumpectomy (removing just the tumor), after a complete mastectomy (removing the entire breast) if the tumor is above a certain size, or if a certain number of lymph nodes are found to have cancer. Some patients will also need chemotherapy (cytotoxic medications) and/or hormone blocking therapy.

External Beam Radiation Therapy

We deliver external beam radiation therapy to the breast via 3-dimensional conformal radiotherapy (3D-CRT) which combines multiple radiation treatment fields which deliver CT guided photons and electrons precisely to the breast while sparing healthy tissue. Treatment planning for radiation therapy is performed using a 16 slice Philips Brilliance™ CT equipped with respiratory gating which enables 4-Dimensional planning for superior radiation treatment delivery. Radiation is delivered on week days in sessions usually lasting under 30 minutes. Your radiation oncologist, physicist, and dosimetrist will calculate the exact number of weeks of therapy. Side effects can include but are not limited to fatigue, skin irritation, and swelling. Tell your radiation oncologist or nurse about any symptoms you may have and how best to address them.