



SULLIVAN CENTER FOR BREAST HEALTH

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Misconceptions About Breast Cancer

Breast cancer occurs 85 to 90 percent of the time as a hard, stony, singular, non-mobile lump that is anchored in surrounding tissues of the breast. Usually it is a painless lump that can be felt, is found in only one breast, and occurs in women over 35 years of age. However, dangerous breast cancer signs are often ignored because they have different characteristics than the lump usually identified as cancer. Learning these common misconceptions about breast cancer could save a woman's life.

Misconception #1:

Young women (under 35) do not have breast cancer.

Breast cancer is more likely to occur in a woman older than 35, but it can occur in very young women. Any lump found at any age needs professional evaluation by a physician.

Misconception #2:

Women with high risk factors (family history, no children, etc.) are usually the ones who will have breast cancer.

76 percent of women who have breast cancer had none of the risk factors. Being female is the highest risk factor. All women are at risk.

Misconception #3:

Breast cancer is not painful; fibrocystic breast condition is what causes the pain. Breast cancer is usually not associated with pain. However, 11 percent of women with breast cancer experienced pain as a symptom. Any breast pain needs thorough evaluation by a physician.

**All Lumps Need Evaluation By
A Healthcare Provider.**

Misconception #4:

A mammogram that is without signs of cancer ensures that no cancer is present. Mammography is a good diagnostic tool, but it has limitations. There are some lumps that you can feel but are not seen on mammography even though mammography is able to detect lumps that are too small to be felt. Ten percent of breast cancers never form a lump that can be felt or seen on mammography. It is important to recognize the clinical signs of breast cancer that produce changes in the breast. Because mammography does not detect 10 to 15 percent of cancers, breast self-exams and clinical exams by a healthcare provider must be performed in conjunction with mammography to insure that a woman receives every method of detection available.

Misconception # 5:

Breast cancer occurs as a single lump and in one breast at a time.

A very small percentage of breast cancers occur with multiple lumps (multicentric) and occur in both breasts. As always, any lump, multiple lumps in one breast, or lumps in both breasts should be fully explored by a healthcare provider.

Misconception #6:

Redness, pain, or bloody discharge are only signs of mastitis (inflammation/infection) in new mothers.

Mastitis is a common occurrence in the young mother, but if, after treatment with antibiotics, the symptoms do not improve or disappear, the patient should be evaluated further. Breast cancer in the young woman can cause the same symptoms as mastitis.