

Breast Cancer in **Zambia**

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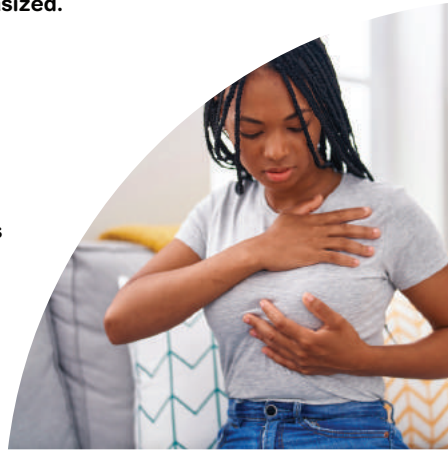


What is Breast Cancer?

Breast cancer is a disease which cells in the breast grow out of control. There are different kinds of breast cancer. The kind of breast cancer depends on which cells in the breast turn into cancer. Most breast cancers begin in the ducts or lobules. Breast cancer can spread outside the breast through blood vessels and lymph vessels. When breast cancer spreads to other parts of the body, it means it has metastasized.

The most common kinds of breast cancer are:

- Invasive ductal carcinoma. The cancer cells begin in the ducts and then grow outside the ducts into other parts of the breast tissue. Invasive cancer cells can also spread or metastasize to other parts of the body.
- Invasive lobular carcinoma. Cancer cells begin in the lobules and then spread from the lobules to the breast tissues that are close by. These invasive cancer cells can also spread to other parts of the body.



Breast Cancer Symptoms:

- New lump in the breast or underarm (armpit).
- Thickening or swelling of part of the breast.
- Irritation or dimpling of breast skin.
- Redness or flaky skin in the nipple area or the breast.
- Pulling in of the nipple or pain in the nipple area.
- Nipple discharge other than breast milk, including blood.
- Any change in the size or the shape of the breast.
- Pain in any area of the breast.

Different people have different symptoms while some people do not have any signs or symptoms at all. No breast is typical. What is normal for one may not be normal for another woman. Most women say their breasts feel lumpy or uneven. The way breasts look, and feel can be affected by the menstrual cycle, having children, losing, or gaining weight, and taking certain medications.



Breast Cancer Screening:

Breast cancer screening means checking a woman's breasts for cancer before there are signs or symptoms of the disease. All women need to be informed by their health care provider about the best screening options for them.

Although breast cancer screening cannot prevent breast cancer, it can help detect the cancer early. Talk to your doctor about which breast cancer screening tests are right for you, and when you should have them.

What is a Mammogram?

A mammogram is an X-ray picture of the breast. A mammogram is used to look for early signs of breast cancer. Regular mammograms can find breast cancer sometimes up to three years before it can be felt.



Breast Cancer Diagnosis:

- Breast ultrasound. A machine that uses sound waves to make pictures, called sonograms, of areas inside the breast.
- Diagnostic mammogram. If you have a problem in your breast, such as lumps, or if an area of the breast looks abnormal on a screening mammo gram, doctors may have you get a diagnostic mammogram. This is a more detailed X-ray of the breast.
- Breast magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). A kind of body scan that uses a magnet linked to a computer. The MRI scan will make detailed pictures of areas inside the breast.
- Biopsy. This is a test that removes tissue or fluid from the breast to be looked at under a microscope and do more testing. There are various kinds of biopsies (for example, fine-needle aspiration, core biopsy, or open biopsy).





If breast cancer is diagnosed, other tests are done to find out if cancer cells have spread within the breast or to other parts of the body. This process is called staging. Whether the cancer is only in the breast, is found in lymph nodes under your arm, or has spread outside the breast determines your stage of breast cancer.

Self-Exam:

A breast self-exam is an early detection tool that uses a combination of physical and visual examinations of the breasts to check for signs and symptoms of breast cancer. You can do a breast self-exam using the methods below.

(1) In the Shower

With the pads/flats of your 3 middle fingers, check the entire breast and armpit area, pressing down with light, medium, and firm pressure. Check both breasts each month, feeling for any new lumps, thickenings, hardened knots, or any other breast changes.

(2) In Front of a Mirror

With your arms at your sides, visually inspect your breasts, looking for any changes in the contour or shape of the breasts, any dimpling, swelling, or other skin irregularities on or around the breasts, or any changes in the nipples.

Next, rest your palms on your hips and press firmly to flex your chest muscles. Look for any dimpling, puckering, or other changes, particularly on one side. Note that the left and right breasts will not exactly match-few women's breasts are perfectly symmetrical.

(3) Lying Down

When lying down, the breast tissue spreads out evenly along the chest wall. Place a pillow under your right shoulder and put your right arm behind your head. Using your left hand, move the pads of your 3 middle fingers around your right breast, covering the entire breast area and armpit.

Use light, medium, and firm pressure to feel for any new lumps, thickenings, hardened knots, or any other breast changes. Also squeeze the nipple to check for discharge. Repeat these steps for your left breast.



Breast Cancer in Zambia:

Breast and cervical cancers are the two most common causes of death of women aged between 16 to 65 years globally. An estimated 592,000 premature deaths were from breast and cervical cancer in 2020, and about 90% occurred in low and middle-income countries.

In Zambia, breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer mortality followed by cervical cancer. According to the Global Women's Health Fund Zambia (GWHF), the incidence of breast cancer among sub-Saharan African women is among the lowest in the world. However, 49-90% of cases of breast cancer are diagnosed at stages III or IV.

In 2010, there were an estimated 1,007 new cases of breast cancer and 359 breast cancer deaths in Zambia. Breast Cancer-specific data in Zambia is still scarce, but breast cancer incidence is on the rise.

The Zambian government has since accelerated its efforts to expand breast cancer early detection and treatment with the support of a donor-sponsored effort by the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation (Breast Cancer Program in Zambia).

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