

## Breast Cancer

Breast cancer is still the most common cancer in white females, even with the lung cancer incidence in females increasing every decade. Female relatives of patients with breast cancer may have an increased risk of the disease. True hereditary breast cancer associated with specific genetic abnormalities is relatively rare and responsible for approximately 5% of breast cancer cases. A larger group of patients may also have a family history, but the cancer incidence in these families is less than in the first group and the genetic abnormalities are less definite.

Mammography is the most important screening modality for the early detection of breast cancer. The value of breast self-examination can however not be stressed enough as a high proportion of lesions are still discovered by the patients themselves.

The age, menopausal status and general health of the patient, stage of the disease, pathologic characteristics of the primary tumor, and various receptor statuses influence the outcome.

To establish a diagnosis and to determine the extent of disease the following investigations are useful:

- Mammography
- Removal of the breast lump for pathological analysis
- Chest X-ray, ultrasound examination of the abdomen and isotope scans
- Blood analysis

*Your doctor may require further investigations depending on your symptoms at presentation.*

### **TREATMENT OPTIONS**

*Treatment will depend on the nature and extent of the disease as well as on your general state of health.*

Breast cancer is highly treatable with surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy and hormonal therapy and most often curable when detected in the early stages.

Surgery depends on the extent of the disease and can be either a partial resection or total mastectomy. After partial resection radiation can be administered to the remainder of the breast to reduce the risk for tumour recurrence. Some patients need radiation to the chest wall even after a mastectomy as they still have a substantial risk for a local recurrence of their cancer. In most incidences additional chemotherapy and/or hormonal therapy is also given to reduce the risk of spread to other body parts at a later stage.

In advanced stages of the disease chemotherapy, hormonal therapy and radiation is often utilised either alone or in combinations with each other with good responses. Breast cancer remains a responsive disease and major treatment advances have been made over the past decade.

*The foregoing information is quite generalized. The specifics of your disease and treatment should be discussed with your oncologist to establish the optimal treatment plan for you as an individual.*