



United Against Breast Cancer

The Most Important Questions
and Answers

Information from the Cancer League



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BREAST CANCER RISKS

How common is breast cancer?

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among women. About 5,500 women develop breast cancer annually in Switzerland, that's more than 15 women every day.

Do men get breast cancer?

Yes. According to statistics, 30 to 40 men develop breast cancer annually in Switzerland.

Can young women also develop breast cancer?

Most women who develop breast cancer are postmenopausal. However, young women can also be at risk. One in five women diagnosed with breast cancer is under the age of 50.

How many women survive breast cancer?

Following diagnosis, approximately 80% of women with breast cancer survive after 5 years in Switzerland. In general, the earlier breast cancer is detected, the better the chances are for successful treatment.

Which factors increase the risk of developing breast cancer in women?

The most important risk factors for breast cancer are:

- Age: the risk of disease increases with age.
- Close relatives (mother, sister, daughter) who have developed breast cancer.
- Inherited predisposition to breast cancer: For approximately 5 to 10% of all women with breast cancer, the disease is linked to inherited predisposition (e. g., in the BRCA1 gene).
- Radiotherapy in the area of the breast (for example: lymphoma treatment).

- Menopausal hormone replacement therapy (estrogen and progestin) lasting several years, or currently, or within the last 10 years, practiced contraception with hormone preparations ('the pill').
- Being overweight after menopause.
- Alcohol consumption.

How does a woman detect that she might have breast cancer?

Some women who are affected first notice a painless lump or a hardening in the breast. There may be a change in the color, shape or size of the breast and/or the nipples. Sometimes, there may be a liquid discharge from the nipple that might indicate breast cancer. In rare cases, the breast may be tender and swollen – although feeling different from premenstrual symptoms. Fortunately however, such observed changes can also be due to causes other than breast cancer. If a woman does notice such changes, she should consult her doctor.

Can a woman have breast cancer although she doesn't have any symptoms?

Early breast cancer usually does not cause symptoms. In most cases, early stage breast cancer is detected by a mammogram.

Are there medications that reduce the risk of breast cancer?

There are medications which reduce the risk of developing breast cancer. However, due to their side-effects, such medications are only used for women at significantly higher risk: for women who are already suffering from breast cancer, in order to lower the risk of recurrence, and for women at a much greater risk of developing hereditary breast cancer.

EARLY DETECTION

What is early detection?

Breast cancer can be detected as early as possible with screening, prior to experiencing breast pain. Early detected breast cancer increases the survival chances of women concerned and treatment tends to be easier, as well as less stressful.

Are there other methods of breast examination?

Mammography is the preferred examination method for women over 50 years of age. Ultrasound examinations are performed additionally in the event of unclear mammography results or in determining an increased density of solid tissue (dense mass). Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) or tomography (MRT), is performed to clarify uncertain results and is also used for young women with highly elevated breast cancer risk. Women of all ages are advised to discuss unusual breast changes with a physician or health care professional.

What is a mammogram?

A mammogram is a breast examination by x-ray. A mammogram is used to detect pathological changes in the breast. A mammogram is the most important method for early detection of breast cancer in women aged 50 and over.

Are mammography x-rays harmful?

X-rays can be harmful. The radiation dose in mammography is very small. Experts estimate the advantages of mammography are clearly greater than the risk from radiation.

What is a screening mammogram?

A screening mammogram is performed within a program and must meet clear quality requirements. Cantons which have adopted an early detection of breast cancer program invite all women aged 50 and over to screening mammograms every other year.

Where are breast cancer early detection programs available?

Currently, there are programs in the cantons of Bern, Fribourg, Geneva, Grisons, Jura, Neuchatel, St. Gallen, Thurgau, Vaud and Valais. There are still no programs in the other cantons. However, political processes are underway in different cantons (as of June 2012).

Who covers the costs of breast cancer screening mammograms?

The costs of a screening mammogram are covered by the health insurer's standard benefits only within the framework of a screening program, or in the case of familial elevated breast cancer risk. In cantons without programs, mammograms are done based on consultation with a doctor.

What are the desirable outcomes of early breast cancer detection?

Scientific studies show that breast cancer deaths can be prevented with a quality controlled screening mammogram program. Moreover, with the early detection of breast cancer, treatment usually tends to be easier and less stressful.

What are the undesirable outcomes screening mammograms?

As in the case of any examination, wrong results from a mammogram could occur. Women may even have to submit to further examinations, although it could turn out that these would not have been necessary. On the other hand, in some women who have breast cancer, it is not visible or detected in some mammograms.

Through the use of mammography, tumors are discovered, and it could be that the woman affected would probably never have symptoms ('over diagnosis'). Unfortunately, it is currently not possible to predict which tumors are harmless. It may be that a malignant tumor is found, which is no longer curable.

Cancer League Recommendations

The Swiss Cancer League recommends and supports screening mammogram programs that are conducted in accordance with European quality standards. The Swiss Cancer League takes the same position as the World Health Organization (WHO).

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Breast cancer can afflict any woman. However, through early detection tests for breast cancer, women can contribute in making sure their risk remains minimal.

Information and Advice

Talk to your doctor if you are in the group of women who are at a greater risk for breast cancer:

- Have close relatives who have breast cancer (mother, sister, daughter)
- Inherited predisposition to breast cancer and/or ovarian cancer
- Malignant diseases of the ovaries

Breast Cancer Screening

In many cantons (see p. 9) there are programs in which women aged 50 and over are invited for a screening mammogram every two years, practically free of charge. Participation is voluntary.

Weigh your own individual benefits and personal risks before deciding if you are for or against screening mammography. If your canton doesn't have a program, consult with your doctor on the subject of breast cancer early detection.

Caution with Use of Hormone Preparations

Taking certain hormone preparations can increase the risk of breast cancer.

- Before you decide to use hormone preparations for contraception and/or hormone replacement therapy for menopause,

thoroughly discuss the advantages and the risks with your doctor, who can then advise you. Perhaps there are alternatives that are better suited to you.

- If you are using a hormone preparation, go to your doctor regularly for a check-up.

Breastfeeding

Studies show evidence that women who breastfeed over a longer period of time slightly decrease their breast cancer risk.

Breast Self-Examination

Breast self-examination (BSE) is an easy way to help detect breast changes. However, it is not a substitute for a clinical breast examination (CBE) or a mammogram for breast cancer early detection. Studies concerning the regular practice of BSE indicate that no decrease in mortality from breast cancer has been noted.

Nevertheless, in individual cases, it is possible that a woman can benefit from regular self-examination.

Symptoms – When to See the Doctor

If you notice unusual changes in your breasts, see your doctor right away so he/she can examine:

- Lumps or hardening in the breasts or in the armpits
- Change in the color, shape or size of breasts
- Skin changes; for example redness, dimpling or pitting
- Turned in or inverted nipples or bloody discharge from nipples
- Breast pain or tenderness that feels different from premenstrual symptoms.

Healthy Living

Maintain a lifestyle that is as healthy as possible; this can decrease your risk for different illnesses and disease.

- Avoid being overweight
- Get plenty of exercise
- Limit alcohol consumption to small quantities. Favor only an occasional drink, but not daily consumption.
- Eat a balanced, varied and healthy diet that includes many fruits and vegetables
- Don't smoke

USEFUL ADDRESSES

- Hotline** Phone 0800 11 88 11, toll-free
and confidential counselling
- E-Mail** helpline@krebssluga.ch,
online counselling service
- Forum** www.krebsforum.ch,
exchange platform for patients
and their loved ones

Support and Advice – The Cancer League in Your Area

Krebsliga Aargau

Tel. 062 834 75 75

www.krebsliga-aargau.ch

Krebsliga Graubünden

Tel. 081 252 50 90

www.krebsliga-gr.ch

Krebsliga beider Basel

Tel. 061 319 99 88

www.klbb.ch

Ligue jurassienne contre le cancer

tél. 032 422 20 30

www.liguecancer-ju.ch

Bernische Krebsliga

Ligue bernoise contre le cancer

Tel. 031 313 24 24

www.bernische-krebsliga.ch

Ligue neuchâteloise contre le cancer

tél. 032 721 23 25

www.liguecancer-ne.ch

Ligue fribourgeoise contre le cancer

Krebsliga Freiburg

tél. 026 426 02 90

www.liguecancer-fr.ch

Krebsliga Ostschweiz

Tel. 071 242 70 00

www.krebsliga-ostschweiz.ch

Krebsliga Schaffhausen

Tel. 052 741 45 45

www.krebsliga-sh.ch

Ligue genevoise contre le cancer

tél. 022 322 13 33

www.lgc.ch

Krebsliga Solothurn

Tel. 032 628 68 10

www.krebsliga-so.ch

Thurgauische Krebsliga

Tel. 071 626 70 00

www.tgkl.ch

Lega ticinese contro il cancro

Tel. 091 820 64 20

www.legacancro-ti.ch

Ligue vaudoise contre le cancer

tél. 021 623 11 11

www.lvc.ch

Ligue valaisanne contre le cancer (Sion)

tél. 027 322 99 74

www.lvcc.ch

Krebsliga Wallis (Brig)

Tel. 027 970 35 41

www.krebsliga-wallis.ch

Krebsliga Zentralschweiz

Tel. 041 210 25 50

www.krebsliga.info

Krebsliga Zug

Tel. 041 720 20 45

www.krebsliga-zug.ch

Krebsliga Zürich

Tel. 044 388 55 00

www.krebsligazuerich.ch

Krebshilfe Liechtenstein

Tel. 00423 233 18 45

www.krebshilfe.li

Other Organizations

English Speaking Cancer Association (ESCA)

Office: Phone 022 791 63 05,

Helpline (outside of office hours): Phone 079 531 55 11,
info@cancersupport.ch, www.cancersupport.ch

English Speaking Cancer Support Group in Basel

cancersupportbasel@gmail.com,

www.cancersupportbasel.wordpress.com

«Leben wie zuvor»

Schweizer Verein für Frauen nach Brustkrebs

Tel. 061 711 91 43, info@leben-wie-zuvor.ch,

www.leben-wie-zuvor.ch

Brustoperierte Frauen (Zentralschweiz)

Kontaktstelle: Krebsliga Zentralschweiz,

Tel. 041 210 25 50, info@krebsliga.info

«Vivre comme avant»

Association d'aide aux femmes atteintes

d'un cancer du sein

tél. 032 435 60 75, mobile 079 638 84 27,

doudou.ljc@bluewin.ch, www.vivre-comme-avant.ch

Marrainage Cancer du Sein

permanence 7/7, 365 jours/365

Genève: tél. 078 622 37 44, marrainage@savoirpatient.ch

Valais: tél. 079 840 16 66, marrainage@savoirpatient.ch

Vaud: tél. 021 623 11 30, marraines.cancerdusein@gmail.com

Association Savoir Patient (ASAP)

Réseau Cancer du Sein

Agir ensemble pour améliorer les soins et la qualité de vie.

Tél. 022 379 49 76/78, rcs@savoirpatient.ch,

www.savoirpatient.ch

Gruppo «Sostegno pazienti EOC»

Centro di Senologia EOC, Tel. 079 605 12 60,

sostegno.senologia@gmail.com

Europa Donna Schweiz

The Swiss Breast Cancer Forum,

Phone 041 480 47 15, sekretariat@europadonna.ch,

www.europadonna.ch

swiss cancer screening

Swiss Association of Cancer Screening Programs

Effingerstrasse 40, P.O. Box 8219, 3001 Bern,

Phone 031 389 93 52, www.brust-screening.ch

Here you'll find screening program addresses, the brochure 'Mammography for early diagnosis. Screening for breast cancer – and improving the chance of a cure' and more information on early detection of breast cancer.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Would You Like to Know More?

See Brochure: 'United Against Breast Cancer – Risk Factors and Screening'

How to order:

- Phone 0844 85 00 00 (Local Rates)
- shop@krebsliga.ch
- www.krebsliga.ch/broschueren
- Cancer League in your Canton

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