

SYMPTOMS

A breast lump or thickened area of skin that feels different from the surrounding tissue



Changes in the colour of the breast skin. In people with white skin, the breast skin may look pink or red. In people with brown and black skin, the breast skin may look darker than the other skin on the chest or it may look red or purple



Change in size, shape or appearance of the breast



Changes to the skin over the breast, such as skin that looks dimpled or looks like an orange peel



WHY WOMEN DIAGNOSED WITH BREAST CANCER DELAY TREATMENT

Health experts say that many prefer to be in denial mode, causing the tumour to grow and spread to other organs like bone, liver, lung, and brain

SINDUJA JANE @Chennai

LAST October, a 30-year-old woman walked into the Chennai Breast Centre for a general evaluation as she had noticed lumps in her breast. She was clinically diagnosed with breast cancer, while a biopsy was suggested to confirm the findings. The doctor treating her said the cancer was in the early stages.

However, she did not come back for the biopsy and instead went in search for a cure in alternative medicine and other therapies. As her condition did not improve, she came back to the centre this month, and the biopsy was performed. But this time, the cancer was found to be in stage two, and the 1cm tumour had grown to 3cm. She is on treatment now.

"This is one of the many cases of delayed treatment. Many women prefer to be in denial mode when they are diagnosed with breast cancer. Even if they suspect breast cancer, they come in late for treatment owing to various reasons including fear of being diagnosed with cancer," said Dr Selvi Radhakrishna, senior consultant and oncoplastic breast surgeon in Chennai.

According to data from the Cancer Institute (WIA), Adyar, Chennai, for 2023, only

3% of patients who came for treatment to the institute for breast cancer were at stage one, 35% at stage two and 37% at stage three, and 18% came at stage 4.

Health experts are flagging this as a concern, as breast cancer ranks number one among all cancers in women in India and it is the leading cause of female cancer related deaths as per the latest GLOBOCAN 2022 report, released in early 2024.

When treatment is delayed, the tumour grows and spreads to other organs like bone, liver, lung and brain. Surgery is done after initial chemotherapy. The stage in which the tumour becomes big or has skin involvement or has axillary lymph nodal spread is called "locally advanced breast cancer", with no spread to distant organs. If this spread happens, it is stage four or metastatic, said Dr V Sridevi, professor, surgical oncology, Cancer Institute (WIA), Adyar.

"When women come early, the treatment will be simpler with a chance of preserving the breast (breast conservation surgery). They can also avoid chemotherapy and the cure rate is also high. When they come late for treatment, it often involves a combination of surgery, chemo and radiation. It is still curable, though the success rate is lesser," said Dr Sridevi.

RISK FACTORS

Family history of breast cancer

Personal history of breast cancer: If you've had cancer in one breast, you have an increased risk of getting cancer in the other breast

Personal history of breast conditions

Beginning your period at a younger age

Beginning menopause at an older age

Gender: Women are much more likely than men are to get breast cancer

Dense breast tissue: Breast tissue is made up of fatty tissue and dense tissue. Dense tissue is made of milk glands, milk ducts and fibrous tissue. Having dense breasts can make it harder to detect breast cancer on a mammogram

Alcohol consumption

Having your first child at an older age

Having never been pregnant: Having been pregnant one or more times lowers the risk of breast cancer

Increasing age

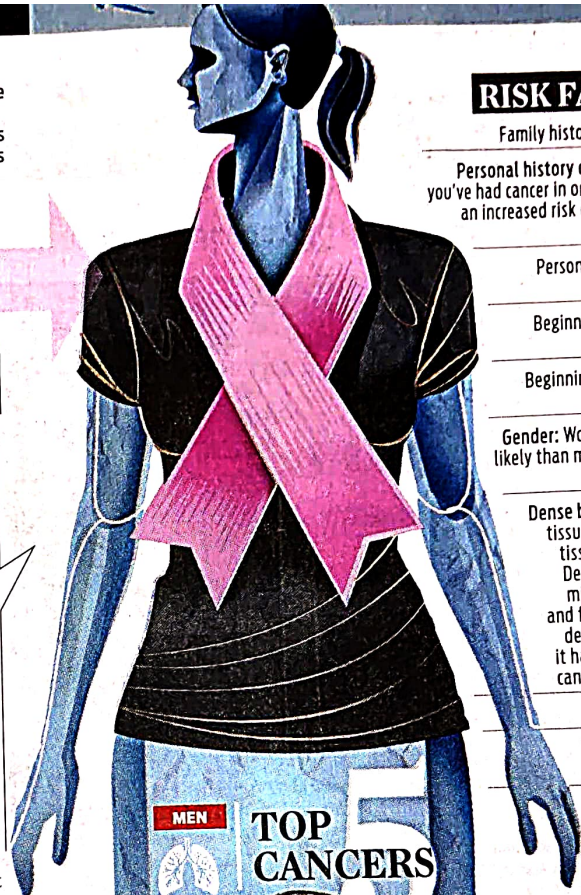
Inherited DNA changes that increase cancer risk

Menopausal hormone therapy: The risk is linked to hormone therapy medicines that combine estrogen and progesterone. The risk goes down when you stop taking these medicines

Obesity

Exposure to radiation: If you received radiation treatments to your chest as a child or young adult, your risk of breast cancer is higher

(Source: mayoclinic.com)



TOP 5 CANCERS

MEN

Lung 10.6%

Mouth 8.4%

Prostate 6.1%

Tongue 5.9%

Stomach 4.8%

WOMEN

Breast 28.8%

Cervix 10.6%

Ovary 6.2%

Liver 3.9%

Corpus uteri 3.7%

