

Screening for Breast Health

The latest (2009) Hong Kong statistics showed that breast cancer is the third leading cause of death from cancer in the female population, and accounted for 10.8% of all cancer deaths in Hong Kong females. In that year, 60% of the women diagnosed with breast cancer were aged between 40 to 59 years. Although the risk of breast cancer is higher with increased age, it is also possible for breast cancer to occur in younger age groups.



Breast Self-Examination

Step 1 Look at your breasts in the mirror with your shoulders straight and your arms on your hips. You should be looking to see if:

- Your breasts are their usual size, shape and colour.
- Your breasts are evenly shaped without visible distortion or swelling.



Step 2 Raise your arms and look again for the same findings as above.



Step 3 To check for nipple discharge, gently squeeze each nipple between your finger and thumb (this could be a milky or yellow fluid or blood).

Step 4 Next, lie down on the bed and check each breast with the opposite hand. Keeping the fingers together, firmly touch the entire breast from top to bottom, side to side. Alternatively, you can start at the nipple, then moving in circles until you reach the outer edge of the breast. Make sure you cover all breast tissue. In denser breast areas, use a firmer touch.



Step 5 Lastly, you can examine your breast while you are standing or sitting. During a shower is often a good time for breast examination as many women find it easier to feel their breasts when their skin is wet and slippery. Use the same method described in step 4.



Breast cancer

Breast cancer happens when normal cells in the breast change and grow out of control. It can happen in BOTH women and men, yet the rate in women is higher than men. Early breast cancer usually does not cause pain or show any symptoms at all. As the cancer grows, however, it can cause the following changes:

- A lump or thickening in or near the breast or under the armpit
- A change in the size or shape of the breast
- A change in the way the breast, or nipple, looks or feels
- Ridges or pitting of the breast - the skin resembles the surface of an orange
- Nipple discharge or nipple tenderness; the nipple may also be inverted, or pulled back into the breast

Cancer can invade the breast tissue and spread to the underarm lymph nodes and other sites of the body, such as the lungs and bones. However, the survival rate of breast cancer is very high if it is detected at an early stage.

Breast cancer screening

It is believed that family history plays an important role in breast cancer incidents. However, only five to six percent of all breast cancer cases are believed to be genetically related. Two genes, BRCA1 and BRCA2, are involved in the development of breast cancer. Therefore, women can perform blood tests to check for the presence of these genes.

Whilst regular screening for breast cancer will not prevent the disease, studies have shown that it will increase the chance of early detection, at a stage when it is easier to treat. There are a few ways to screen for breast cancer:

Self-examination

From the age of 20, take the time to do a visual and breast self examination. To do a self examination, please follow the instructions in this information sheet or consult a doctor or nurse.

Clinical check up

From the age of 30, visit your doctor every year to have a breast examination. During a breast examination, the doctor or nurse will look at the breasts and carefully feel each breast and the area under the arm. The doctor will look for any lumps, nipple discharge or changes in the tissue or skin.

Mammograms

From the age of 40, women should consider having mammograms every two years until the age of 70. A mammogram is an x-ray of the breast. It detects lumps much smaller (3 mm) than those that can be felt by women themselves, or by the most experienced physicians. Therefore, mammograms can detect cancer early, before it spreads to other parts of the body.

The above are three common breast cancer screening. The following tests can also be done to investigate breast cancer if necessary.

Breast MRI

The use of breast MRI to screen for breast cancer is controversial. Breast MRI uses magnetic resonance to create a fine image of the breast. It does not have radiation. It is not necessary for most women to use MRI as a cancer screening tool because when compared with a mammogram, it is less effective in detecting certain breast problems. It may produce



a false positive result of breast cancer. However, studies have shown that in women of young age and high cancer risk (e.g. with BRCA1 or BRCA2), breast MRI is a more sensitive screening test to detect breast cancer than a mammogram.

Breast ultrasound

A breast ultrasound is best for women below 40 years old. It is mainly used to screen a limited area of breast and is often used to detect any filled cysts or solid lumps.

Procedure of a mammogram

A mammogram is a fairly routine procedure though some women may find it uncomfortable. Before the procedure, a short questionnaire will be completed to determine the medical history. The patient will be given a gown to wear and will be asked to remove the bra and any accessories around the neck.

During the procedure, a female radiographer will position the patient's breasts on the plates. This can make some women feel uncomfortable, but the radiographer is trained to do this and works quickly. The x-ray plates will compress the breast tissue. This can be painful, but will last no more than 30 seconds.

Each breast is x-rayed at least twice, once from the top down and the other from side to side so that the radiographer can get a good look at the tissue.

Special precautions before having the mammogram

1. It is best to have the mammogram right after the period, as the breast will be least tender or swollen. Therefore, if menstruation is about to start or has started, try to reschedule the appointment
2. Do not wear deodorant or talcum powder
3. This test is not suitable for pregnant women
4. If oral contraceptives are used, schedule the test on the day a new pill pack starts

What if the result is abnormal?

Do not panic if the result of the mammogram is abnormal. Nine out of 10 women with an abnormal mammogram turn out NOT to have breast cancer. Depending on the doctor's assessment, more diagnostic tests might be needed in order to investigate the abnormality. An example would be a breast biopsy. During a biopsy, a small amount of tissue from the breast is taken out and sent to a laboratory to test for the presence of cancer cells.

If the doctor thinks that the abnormal result is probably not due to cancer, another mammogram in six months might be suggested.

What about the risks?

Screening is recommended for the early detection of breast cancer, which will enable treatment to take place when it is easier to control the disease. However, ladies should also understand the risks involved.

There might be concerns about the radiation level of a mammogram. However, the dose of radiation is very low. Evidence clearly suggests that the life-saving benefits of early cancer detection far outweigh the negligible risks of low-level radiation exposure.

Apart from risks of the screening procedure itself, screening for breast cancer may produce false-positive results that require further testing. There is also a possibility for overdiagnosis, which means that patients are receiving treatment for a cancer that, if undiscovered, would not have caused any harm.

As such, always seek the advice and guidance of attending physicians to discuss options that are relevant to the individual's unique circumstances, such as age, family history, and other considerations.

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References:

UpToDate health information source

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及早檢驗 預防乳癌

乳癌是香港女性的第三大癌症殺手。根據香港二零零九年之數據顯示，乳癌佔全港女性的死亡率十點八個百份比，而在所有診斷出患上乳癌的女性當中，有百份之六十的女士為四十至五十九歲。雖然乳癌的患病率會隨著年齡而增加，然而乳癌亦有機會發生在較年輕的人士身上。



乳房自我檢查

第一步 站在鏡前，肩膀成一直線，把雙手放在盆骨上，觀察胸部是否有以下徵狀：



- 胸部大小、形狀及顏色與平時有分別
- 胸部形狀是否平均分佈、凹凸不均或特別腫脹

第二步 舉高雙手及重覆第一步的檢查，觀察是否有異常的地方。



第三步 用姆指及食指輕按乳頭，觀察乳頭有否滲出分泌物（奶白色或黃色的分泌物或血液）。

第四步 躺在床上，用相反的手檢查乳房，手指應齊放



及穩固地由上至下再由左至右地檢查乳房。部驟可從乳頭開始，用手指齊放，打圈地檢查至乳房的外邊。而乳房較深層的位置，則可用較大的力度來檢查。切記要檢查所有乳房組織。

第五步 最後，站立或坐下，用同一方法檢查乳房。很多女士都會於洗澡時作乳房檢查，因為洗澡時乳房較濕滑，會較容易檢查。



乳癌

乳癌是指乳房的正常細胞出現病變並且不受控制地生長。雖然男女都可患上乳癌，但女士的病發率較男士為高。早期的乳癌通常沒有明顯徵狀，而患者亦不會感到任何痛楚。但隨著癌細胞續漸生長，乳房或會出現以下變化：

- 乳房周圍或腋下出現硬塊
- 乳房大小或形狀改變
- 乳房出現坑紋或脊狀，或呈橙皮紋
- 乳頭表面或形狀出現變化
- 乳頭變硬或流出分泌物；或出現凹入情況

癌細胞會侵入乳房組織及擴散至腋下的淋巴腺，甚至會擴散到肺部、骨骼等。不過，如乳癌能及早發現，病人的活存率是很高的。

乳房健康檢查

很多人相信患上乳癌的成因均與家族病例有關。然而，在眾多乳癌患症中，只有五至六個百分比是因基因所致。兩種癌症基因，BRCA1及BRCA2是引發乳癌的基因。因此，女士們均可驗血，測試這兩種基因有否存在。

定期的乳癌預檢或雖不能完全防止乳癌出現，惟有研究顯示，預檢促使及早診斷及治理，因此能減低乳癌的死亡率。以下是不同乳房預檢的方法：

自我檢查

從二十歲開始，女士們便應作自我檢查。請參考乳房自我檢查的列表，或向主診醫生或護士尋求幫助。

臨床檢查

從三十歲開始，女士們便應每年約見醫生作乳房檢查。醫生或護士會觀察和觸檢乳房及腋下，以識別異常狀況如硬塊、分泌物或皮膚變化等。

乳房X光造影檢查

從四十歲開始，女士們應考慮每兩年作乳房X光造影檢查，直至七十歲。乳房X光造影檢查是乳房軟組織的X光照片。此項檢查能探測出少至三毫米的硬塊，精準度比起自我檢查或由觸檢更為高，有助及時於癌細胞擴散至其它部位前檢測出來。

以上是用作檢測乳癌的方法，而醫生會因應病人的個別情況而建議下列的跟進檢查。

乳房磁力共振

利用乳房磁力共振來檢測乳癌仍存在爭議。惟磁力共振不含輻射，而是利用磁力來拍攝乳房的照片。一般情況下，X光造影是較磁力共振更能有效驗出相關乳房病徵。另





外，磁力共振有機會得出假陽性結果。然而，研究顯示磁力共振對於一些年少而高風險的女士（擁有癌症基因 BRCA1 及 BRCA2）卻是一項較精準的測試。

乳房超聲波測試

這項檢查適合四十歲以下的女士。測試會檢查局部乳房並找出水囊或硬塊。

乳房X光造影檢查過程

乳房X光造影檢查過程非常簡單。一些女士於進行期間或許會感到不舒服，但一般來說不會造成任何影響。檢查進行前須填寫問卷以便醫護人員能更了解過去病歷。接受檢查的女士須穿著長袍並須脫去上半身的衣服、胸圍及頸飾。

過程中，一名女性放射治療師會協助病人把乳房固定於適當的位置。一些女士可能會因此感覺不自在，但放射治療師是受過專業訓練並且能迅速地完成工序。乳房組織將放於X光碟之間，屆時可能會感到一點痛楚，但過程只需約三十秒。每邊乳房需最少照射兩次，一次由乳房的上至下，第二次在乳房的兩邊，以確保取得整個乳房的造影。

如檢查結果異常應怎麼辦？

如檢查結果異常，請不要擔心。九成得出異常結果的女士均沒有乳癌。視乎醫生的評估而定，病人或需要接受其他測試，如取活組織切片，以便作進一步診斷。活組織切片檢查會將一小部份的乳房組織抽取並送到化驗室作癌細胞測試。

如醫生認為所得出的異常結果非由癌症所致，醫生或會建議病人於六個月後再作另一次乳房X光造影檢查。

接受檢查前的準備

- 1 女士們最好在月經來潮後接受檢查，因為乳房將不會性別腫脹或敏感。所以如月經已經或將會來潮，請另安排時間作檢查
- 2 請勿在檢查前使用止汗劑或爽身粉
- 3 切勿於懷孕期間接受此檢查
- 4 如正服食避孕藥，請於開始一包新藥當日接受檢查

檢查風險

乳房檢查能及早檢測乳癌，從而使病人得到及早的治療並控制病情。然而，女士們亦需清楚了解檢查的風險。

一些女士或會擔心X光造影檢查的輻射量。其實，此檢查的輻射量很低，研究指出及早發現癌病的益處遠遠超越低輻射可能帶來的風險。

除了檢查過程的風險外，乳癌預檢或會檢測出假陽性結果，從而令到病人需作更多測試。由於有一些病變是不會演變成為癌病，預檢得出的結果有時亦會帶來無必要的治療及焦慮。

乳房檢查的需要會視乎病人的年齡、家族病例或其他考慮因素而定。因此病人必須向醫生查詢接受乳房檢查的建議。

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參考資料：

UpToDate 網站

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