



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
Ministry of Health

Check Yourself!

Breast Cancer in Trinidad and Tobago

Breast cancer is the most common cancer amongst women. In Trinidad and Tobago, the incidence is 37 per 100,000 population. The mortality rate has been more or less unchanged since 2000 at 23 per 100,000. About 1 in 9 women over their lifetime will develop breast cancer.

What factors are known to increase the risks of developing cancer?

Some factors known to increase risk include:

1. Family history of breast cancer;
2. Previous Breast biopsy for benign disease;
3. Increased Breast density;
4. Alcohol use;
5. Post menopausal women who are overweight;
6. Current oral contraceptive use;
7. Previous diagnosis of Breast cancer
8. Nulliparity (women who were never pregnant); and
9. Other cancers in the family (colon, uterine, ovarian and prostate).

Are there any factors that reduce Breast cancer risk?

1. Age of first birth less than 30 years;
2. Breast feeding; and
3. More than 3 children.

How does breast cancer manifest itself?

The most common presentation is a painless lump. Other symptoms to look out for include a nipple discharge, skin changes on breast, and change in the appearance of the nipple.

What can one do to detect these symptoms?

All women should be able to do a breast self examination. Any change in shape or texture or the presence of a lump should then be examined by a Doctor.



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What further tests or investigations may be required?

Having taken a complete history and examined the lump the doctor may request an ultrasound scan of the breasts (generally in women under 40 years) or mammography. Some specialist may choose to perform a biopsy at the time of out patient consultation. (This may be a fine needle aspiration or a core biopsy)

What to expect if the biopsy confirms cancer?

Once cancer is confirmed, the specialist will have to determine if the cancer has spread or is confined to the breast. He also has to determine if disease is confined to one part of the breast. (A mammogram and/or ultrasound scan may be requested if not already done). A Computerised Tomographic (CT) scan of the Chest and Abdomen may be performed prior to any intervention to confirm or rule out distant spread.

If spread to the brain is considered, then a CT brain is performed. A radionuclide bone scan may be requested if spread to the bone is considered.

What Interventions are likely?

The specific interventions are determined by the size of the tumour and the presence of distant spread. Your healthcare professional can guide you on different types of surgery that can be done based on the size of the tumour. Radiotherapy as well as hormonal or chemotherapy may also be required.

Are these treatments available in the public health system?

Yes. In all the major hospitals in Trinidad and Tobago breast surgeries are performed. Chemotherapy Administration Units are functional in San Fernando General, Sangre Grande Hospital and The National Radiotherapy Centre (NRC), St James.

Radiotherapy services are available at the NRC, St. James

What about reconstruction of the breasts?

Some public institutions may have the services available for breast reconstruction using either tissue that is native to the patient. (TRAM-Transverse Rectus Abdominis Myocutaneous Flaps, Latissimus Dorsi Flaps). This is when tissue from the abdomen or back is moved to the area where the breast is removed. Reconstruction can also be performed using artificial implants.

All the major hospitals have either General Surgeons or Plastic Surgeons who can provide this service.



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