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Health and wellness tips for your work, home and life—brought to you by the insurance and healthcare specialists at M3.

## Women's Health: Breast Cancer

Research estimates that 1 in 8 women will develop invasive breast cancer during her lifetime.

Breast cancer is a disease in which malignant cells form in the tissues of the breast. Below are the two most common types of breast cancer:

- **Invasive ductal carcinoma** – The most common type; begins in the lining of the milk duct in the breast. Makes up nearly 70-80 percent of all cases.
- **Invasive lobular carcinoma** – Begins in the milk-producing glands, the lobules, and is more often found in both breasts than other types of breast cancer. Makes up about 10 percent of all cases.

### Causes and Risk Factors

While it is unclear what specifically triggers breast cells to grow abnormally, experts attribute the development of breast cancer to a combination of genetics, lifestyle choices and reproductive factors that may include the following items:

- Older age
- Menstruation at an early age (before age 12), or those who went through menopause later (after age 55)
- Family history of breast cancer
- Having dense breast tissue
- Never having given birth, or having first given birth after age 30
- Having radiation therapy to the breast or chest

- Using oral contraceptives – although, this risk appears to go back to normal over time after the pills are stopped.
- Being diagnosed with certain benign breast conditions
- Drinking alcoholic beverages
- Hormone therapy with estrogen after menopause
- Being obese or overweight after menopause
- Lack of physical activity

### Symptoms and Screenings

The most common indication of breast cancer is discovering a lump in the breast or underarm area. Other signs include:

- Swelling
- Skin irritation or dimpling
- Nipple pain or abnormalities
- Redness or scaly skin
- Discharge from the nipple

To detect breast cancer, a doctor may use a mammogram, or a biopsy, which is the removal of cells or tissues to be viewed under a microscope. Estrogen and progesterone receptor tests may also be used to determine the levels of each hormone, or an MRI may be used, which is a procedure that uses a magnet, radio waves and a computer to make a series of detailed pictures of inside the body.

### Prognosis and Treatment

The chance of recovery and the treatment options depend on many factors, including the stage of cancer, how fast the tumor is growing, hormone receptor levels and a woman's age and general health. There are four standard types of treatment for breast cancer:

- Surgery, ranging from a small lump of tissue being removed to the entire breast (mastectomy)
- Radiation therapy, which uses high-energy X-rays to kill cancer cells or to prevent their growth
- Chemotherapy, which uses drugs to stop the growth of cancer cells
- Hormone therapy, which removes hormones or blocks their action to keep cancer cells from growing

### Prevention

It is important to give yourself a monthly breast exam and to talk to your doctor about when to begin annual mammogram screenings. The following are other ways to potentially keep breast cancer at bay:

- Limit alcohol and fats
  - Stay physically active
  - Maintain a healthy weight
- Visit [www.breastcancer.org](http://www.breastcancer.org) or [www.komen.org](http://www.komen.org) for more information.

### Did You Know...?

Research estimates that 1 in 8 women will be diagnosed with invasive breast cancer during her lifetime.