

Men's Breasts Are At Risk Too

Did you know that men can also have breast cancer? Be surprised and amazed but it is a matter of fact. Men, just like women, can also develop cancer cells in their breasts. Only, the chances of men having one is much lower than that of women's. Moreover, the reason most people, even most men themselves, think that breast cancer is only for women is the very low incidence or recorded cases of male breast cancer. In America, male breast cancer accounts for only 1 percent of cases of breast cancer, and represents about 0.2% of all malignancies in men. This figure is far from tens of thousands of cases for women each year. In 2005, roughly 1,690 cases of male breast cancer were recorded in the United States, 460 of which led to death.

The principle behind male breast cancer is not that hard to understand. Basically, what happens when a woman develops a breast cancer is largely the same event leading to a breast cancer for men. What probably confuses people is the word "breast" for it has always been associated with femininity and seldom, if ever, with masculinity. So for both men and women startled with the idea of male breast cancer, the first thing to do is to understand cancer in itself, independent of gender.

Cancer, as most people already know, is a disease caused by an abnormal growth of cells. As these cancer cells increase in number, they form masses of tissues that the body does not need-- tumor. If the growth is greatly uncontrollable, damages in the health system occur and can even lead to death, if not attended immediately and properly. The process of developing cancer cells can happen in the different parts of the body-- men's breasts included.

At the onset of physiological development in men, male hormones (such as testosterone) produced by the testes deters the growth of breast tissue and the development of lobules. The male breast is made up of predominantly small, undeveloped ducts and a small amount of fat and connective tissue, unlike that of women's breasts. Male breast cancer happens when there is an uncontrollable growth of the small amount of non-functioning breast tissues. These breast tissues do not produce milk and are found in the area directly behind the nipple, on the chest wall.

Just like in women, the causes of male breast cancer are still unknown even to this date. What are identified by years of studies and researches are just the risk factors for developing male breast cancer. The first contributing factor is exposure

to radiation. Exposure to ionizing radiation or radiation therapy for previous illnesses is identified as a factor that triggers growth of breast tissues. Hyperestrogenism is also a risk factor. From the word itself, there is an overproduction of the female hormone estrogen in a man's body. Men, by nature, really have estrogen in their bodies. But when the amount increases beyond what the body needs, chances of developing a breast cancer also increase. Actually, majority of male breast cancer cases is attributed to this risk factor. Men with Klinefelter's syndrome (abnormal sex chromosome) and cirrhosis are likely to develop breast cancer because of stimulated estrogen production. Genetics also play a great role. Men with female relatives who had breast cancer are at greater risks of developing breast cancer.

Male breast cancer has different types, most common of which is the infiltrating ductal carcinoma. This is the breast cancer type when the cancer started from the tubular ducts and has spread to the surrounding area. Opposite of this is ductal carcinoma in situ, the second type. The others are Paget's disease (affecting the skin of the nipple), papillary carcinoma, inflammatory carcinoma, and medulla carcinoma. Symptoms of breast cancer include the presence of a lump (usually right beneath the nipple), nipple discharge (more likely to happen in men than women), nipple retraction, and skin ulceration. In advanced cases, symptoms like malaise, weight loss, and weakness are commonly present.

Like breast cancer in women, male breast cancer is commonly treated with mastectomy. Mastectomy is a surgery which removes the lining over the chest muscles and portions of the axillary lymph nodes. This then is followed by adjuvant therapies like chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and hormonal therapy. The combination of possible treatments is defined and administered by medical experts based on the patient's cancer stage and overall health condition.

The National Cancer Institute has made it clear that in order to mitigate the damages of male breast cancer, and all cancers at that, early detection is a must. This then should send a message to all men that it is high time for them to recognize that their breasts may be at risk, too. Being aware of their health will not make them lesser of a man but more of a complete man (with no breast missing), actually.

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