

# About Breast Cancer



## Risk Factors

- Gender - simply being female
- Age 50 or older
- Personal or family history of breast cancer
- Early puberty
- Late menopause
- Obesity
- Physical inactivity
- Long term heavy tobacco use
- Alcohol use
- Other factors:
  - Hormone replacement therapy
  - Radiation treatment to the breast and/or chest
  - Inherited changes in certain genes (BRCA1)

Breast cancer is a malignant tumor that starts in the cells of the breast. Except for skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common cancer in American women. While breast cancer occurs mostly in women, men can get it also.

## Breast Cancer in North Carolina

Breast cancer (female only) was the third leading cause of cancer deaths among North Carolina women in 2012. There were 1,286 breast cancer deaths among North Carolina women in 2012 and over 6,350 deaths from 2008-2012.<sup>1</sup>

Mammograms are the most effective method to detect breast cancer before it causes symptoms or can be detected by touch. Between 2007 and 2011, 95 percent of women in North Carolina diagnosed in the earliest stage of breast cancer lived five years or longer compared to 34 percent diagnosed in the advanced stages. Early detection saves lives.<sup>2</sup>

It is important for women of all races and ethnicities to be screened for breast cancer. White women are most likely to be diagnosed with breast cancer than women of any other race or ethnicity. However, African American women are more likely to die of this disease, due to late detection and more aggressive type of breast cancers.

The North Carolina Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program (NC BCCCP) provides free or low-cost breast and cervical cancer screenings and follow-up to eligible women in North Carolina. These services are offered at most local health departments as well as some community health centers, hospitals and private physicians' offices across the state.

## Signs and Symptoms of Breast Cancer

- New lump in the breast or armpit
- Thickening or swelling of part of the breast
- Irritation or dimpling of breast skin
- Redness or flaky skin around the nipple or breast
- Pulling in of the nipple or pain in the nipple area
- Discharge other than breast milk from the nipple
- Pain anywhere in the breast
- Any change in the size or shape of the breast

If you have any of these signs or have questions about breast cancer, contact your healthcare provider for an appointment.

<sup>1</sup> State Center for Health Statistics, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. North Carolina Central Cancer Registry. *Statistics and Reports: Cancer*. <http://www.schs.state.nc.us/data/cancer.cfm>

<sup>2</sup> State Center for Health Statistics, North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. North Carolina Central Cancer Registry. Projected New Cancer Cases and Deaths For All Sites, 2014. <http://www.schs.state.nc.us/schs/CCR/proj14site.pdf>