



Testing and Early Diagnosis

The Prevalence of Breast Cancer and Tools for Early Detection

Dr. Medhavi Gupta - Oncologist, Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center, Assistant Professor of Medicine, Brown University

Maria Christian - Head of Partnerships and Programs, Global Resource for Advancing Cancer Education (GRACE)

Maria Hello everybody! Thank you so much for joining us. My name is Maria Christian and I am the Head of Programs and Partnerships here at GRACE. I am very thankful to be joined today by Dr. Medhavi Gupta.

Dr. Medhavi Thanks Maria for having me.

Maria Thank you so much for being here. I know today we're going to talk a little bit about breast cancer and the importance of testing and screening. So, umm, we'll just go ahead and jump right into that if that's okay with you?

Dr. Medhavi Of course.

Maria Okay! So, to begin with, could you tell us how common breast cancer is in the U.S.?

Dr. Medhavi So yeah, I did say breast cancer actually is the most common cancer in women after skin cancer. And moreover, it is the second most common cause of cancer death in women after lung cancer. Based on the recent estimates by American Cancer Society for the year 2022, approximately 280,000 women are expected to be diagnosed with breast cancer this year alone, and, out of these, about 40,000 women will die of breast cancer. If we talk for an average-risk woman, there is about one in eight chance that a woman will get breast cancer in her lifetime.

Maria As you explained, breast cancer is not only a common cancer among women, but also a common reason for cancer death. What can women do for early detection of breast cancer?

Dr. Medhavi So, studies have shown that getting annual mammograms are one of the best tools to detect breast cancer at an early stage. And when cancers are detected at an early stage, there are too many advantages. Firstly, patients are less likely to need aggressive treatments, to need aggressive surgeries like mastectomies, whereby you remove the whole of the breast, or even aggressive systemic medications such as chemotherapies. And, I think, more importantly, we know that if breast cancers are diagnosed at an early stage, they are much more likely to be cured off breast cancer. So different international societies have different recommendations for breast cancer screening; but, in general, for an average-risk woman, the recommendation is to start mammograms at the age of



forty years, and repeat them annually. Now, there may be some women who are at higher risk of getting breast cancer. It could be because they had a history of breast cancer, or someone in their family had breast cancer, there could be known genetic mutations in the family such as graham mutations, or patients could have received radiation therapy to their chest wall in their earlier years. So for these high-risk women, the recommendation is to start screening early, at around the age of thirty years, and usually patients are recommended not only to undergo mammograms, but MRI in addition to mammograms. So my suggestion would be, talk to your doctor, be it at your annual visit or any regular visit, and your doctors should certainly be able to guide you as to what your risk is in terms of carrying the breast cancer, at what age you should start the screening, what screening tests are the best suited for you, and how else to deal with them.