



Lesson Vocabulary

Cancer and Breast Cancer

Cancer – begins when normal cells change and grow out of control, resulting in a *tumor*. Many types of breast cancer are treatable. Others may be life threatening.

Breast Cancer is a malignant (cancerous) tumor that originates from cells in the breast, usually in the lining of the milk ducts, or in the “lobules” that produce milk.

Breast cancer is thought to be many different diseases. How it starts may depend on age, genes, exposure to estrogen over a woman’s life cycle, health habits, environmental factors and other unknowns.

Most breast cancers result from mutations (mistakes) that take place in breast cells after birth. Only 5 – 10 % of breast cancer mutations are related to an *inherited* defect, or mistake in the genes every person is born with.

A **tumor** is a collection of abnormal cells that multiply without any order, forming a *lump*. Not all tumors are cancerous. A harmless, or **benign** (be-9) **tumor** is a non-cancerous growth the *does not spread* to other parts of the body, and seldom threatens life. It is important to find out from a doctor if a breast lump is benign, or cancerous.

Invasive: cancerous cells that have broken through the borders of surrounding healthy tissue. Invasive breast cancers can spread to nearby tissue or other body sites.

Early Detection and Medical Treatment of Breast Cancer

Breast Exams – methods of detecting changes in the breast by “looking and feeling.” Young women are encouraged to learn about *breast self-exams** and do these each month. A doctor or nurse does a *clinical breast exam (check-up)* for an adult woman. *It is recommended that young women begin clinical breast exams, starting at age 20.*

Mammogram –a low-dose X-ray that gives a clear, detailed picture of the breast. Usually, women ages 35 - 40 will have their first mammogram, followed by regular mammograms through age 85. Mammograms detect changes early. A *Radiologist* is a doctor who reviews the mammogram (x-ray) and looks for abnormal changes or tumors that may or may not be cancerous.



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When Cancer is Caught Early, medical treatments can lead to better survival. It is important to know your family's history for breast cancer and get regular exams.

- *Breast self-exam and mammography information with video instruction is available through the Susan G. Komen Foundation (www.komenfoundation.org) or the American Cancer Society.

Lumpectomy – the removal of either a *benign* or *cancerous breast lump*, including a small amount of surrounding breast tissue. This surgery helps to keep the breast shape.

Mastectomy – the surgical removal of the breast tissue beneath the outer breast skin. Newer techniques spare some breast tissue to “re-construct” or re-shape the breast.

Radiation therapy – treatment that uses high-powered x-rays to get rid of cancer cells and prevent them from growing back. Temporary side effects can be skin soreness.

Chemotherapy – A treatment that uses powerful drugs to fight cancer cells in the body. *Temporary* chemotherapy side effects include tiredness, nausea, and hair loss. Treatment may take weeks or months. Hair grows back after chemotherapy.

Cancer support group – helps people with cancer to cope with their feelings, and learn what to expect as they go through their treatments and keep up with daily life

Environment, Gene and Lifestyle Risk Factors & Preventive Action

Risk Factor – anything that increases the *chance (odds)* of getting a disease.

Risk factors for breast cancer are known as:

Less-Modifiable -being a woman and growing older, having specific inherited mistakes in the genes, or a family history of breast cancer (mother or sister)

Modifiable - exposures and lifestyle health habits that we have some control over

Risk Reduction -actions you can take to reduce your odds of developing any disease. Risk reduction is action taken for prevention when the exact cause is an unknown.

Environment –Everything around you that affects your health and some diseases such as: air, water, food, chemicals, where we live and work, and the effects of stress. Scientists are studying how *specific* environmental factors may affect breast cancer.

Carcinogen –any environmental factor that causes changes in genes that can result in the growth of cancer cells at the very early stages. Carcinogens can be biological,



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physical, or chemical. High doses of ionizing radiation to the chest (a treatment for Hodgkin’s disease) is a known *carcinogen* that causes breast cancer later in life.

*Zero Breast Cancer Adolescent Education Project **Vocabulary** Adapted from the following References:*

National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences- Community Outreach Resource Center,

Breast Cancer, Genes, Ethics, and the Environment Workshop and Breast Cancer Fact Sheet

University of North Carolina Chapel Hill Center for Environmental Health and Susceptibility, 2005

Vogel, C, Breast Cancer Questions and Answers for Young Women, 21st Century Press, 2001

Aronson, V., Everything You Need to Know About Breast Health and Cancer Detection, Rosen Publishing, 2000

Zero Breast Cancer’s has created this Vocabulary to provide general breast cancer information for educational purposes.

This information supplement is not intended to a substitute for the advice of a physician or a health care professional.