Breast cancer in men is the same disease which affects women\(^1\),\(^2\). All males have breast tissue behind the nipple (fat, fibrous tissues, fine ducts and glandular elements or lobules) which has the potential for cancerous change\(^3\).

Breast cancer is uncommon in men; less than 1% of all breast cancer diagnosed annually in New Zealand (NZ) is in men. This is approximately 20 men per year\(^1,2\).

Most people do not realise men can develop breast cancer. Men may feel embarrassed and isolated after diagnosis of a disease they didn’t know they could get\(^4\).

The overall survival rate for men with breast cancer is similar to women\(^2\). In NZ, the 5 year survival rate is 80-85%\(^5\).

Breast cancer symptoms in men can include:
- A painless lump close to the nipple (most common symptom)
- Fluid discharge from the nipple
- A change in appearance of the nipple
- A change in the shape or appearance of the breast, such as swelling or skin dimpling
- Pain in the breast
- Lumps in the armpit (axilla)

It is important that men see their doctor promptly if they notice any new changes in their breast as a benign (non-cancerous) enlargement due to hormonal influences is not uncommon, particularly in adolescents, young men and over 60 year old men\(^4\).

The most common male breast cancer risk factors are:
- Getting older\(^4,6\)
- Having a strong family history of breast (and/or ovarian) cancer\(^4\)

Surgical treatment usually involves mastectomy and removal of lymph nodes from the armpit (axilla). Reconstruction can be used to improve the appearance of the chest wall\(^6,7\).

Adjuvant treatment (after surgery) is the same as for women and may include hormonal manipulation, radiation therapy, chemotherapy or other targeted therapy\(^6\).

The oft neglected psychological and social aspects of men having a woman’s cancer are increasingly recognised internationally\(^6\), and recently online support groups for men have become available which provide information and reduce their sense of isolation\(^8\).

For More Information

References