

# CMScript

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Breast Cancer Awareness Month - October 2023

## Male Breast Cancer

Breast cancer is commonly associated with women, but it is important to note that men also have breast tissue and can be at risk for developing breast cancer. Although the incidence of male breast cancer in South Africa is not well documented, it was reported in the most recent South African cancer registry to account for 1.8% of all breast cancer cases compared to worldwide male breast cancer of less than 1%. Black men have higher incidence rates for all breast cancer subtypes.

### What are the types of male breast cancer?

- **Ductal carcinoma** refers to cancer that starts in the milk ducts. This cancer makes up the majority of male breast cancers.
- **Lobular cancer**, known as lobular carcinoma, starts in the glands that produce milk. This type of breast cancer is uncommon because men's breast tissue contains very few lobules.
- Other cancers include **Inflammatory breast cancer** and **Paget's disease**, which is primarily found in the area around the nipple, are two less common forms of breast cancer that also affect men.

### What are the risk factors?

Early detection of male breast cancer in men increases the likelihood of a successful treatment. However, many men put off visiting a doctor when they experience unusual symptoms or signs. Because of this, many cases of male breast cancer are discovered when the condition is more advanced.



Factors that increase the risk of male breast cancer include:

- Growing old. Men aged 40 to 80 are most likely to develop breast cancer.
- Genetic mutations. The risk of developing breast cancer is increased by inherited changes (mutations) in certain genes, such as BRCA1 and BRCA2.
- Family history of breast cancer. If a close relative has had breast cancer, a man is more likely to develop the disease himself.
- Radiation therapy treatment. Breast cancer risk is higher for men who have undergone chest radiation therapy.

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- Hormone therapy treatment. Previously, estrogen-containing medications used to treat prostate cancer increased men's risk of developing breast cancer. Estrogen is a hormone that aids in developing and maintaining female sex characteristics.
- Overweight and obesity. Older men who are overweight or have obesity have a higher risk of getting breast cancer because it increases the number of fat cells in the body. Fat cells convert androgens into estrogen, which may increase the amount of estrogen in the body and increase the risk of breast cancer.
- Klinefelter's syndrome. This genetic syndrome occurs when a boy is born with more than one copy of the X chromosome. The syndrome causes abnormal development of the testicles, and as a result, men with this syndrome produce lower levels of certain male hormones androgens and more female hormones (estrogens).
- Being a heavy user of alcohol can limit the liver's ability to regulate blood estrogen levels, which leads to a higher risk of developing breast cancer.

## What are the signs and symptoms of male breast cancer?

Men who have breast cancer typically experience the following symptoms:

- Swelling of the affected breast or a painless lump in the breast;
- Inverted nipple (nipple turned inwards);
- Discharge or bleeding from the nipple;
- Breast discomfort or a pulling sensation;
- Skin or nipple changes such as dimpling, puckering, redness, or scaling.

## How do you diagnose male breast cancer?

The same techniques that are used to diagnose breast cancer in women are used in men:

- Physical examination – Examination of the breast to check for skin changes, lumps or other abnormalities.
- Imaging tests - Mammograms can detect the majority of male breast cancers. A mammogram is a low-dose X-ray that takes pictures of the breast tissue. An ultrasound may also be performed.
- Biopsies - Small tumour tissue samples are removed and examined under a microscope.

## Staging of male breast cancer

Staging describes how far the cancer has grown and is used to understand the prognosis and to make a treatment plan. Imaging tests, such as Bone scan, CT scan and Positron emission tomography (PET) scan, are commonly used in the staging of male breast cancer. The stages of breast cancer range from 0 to 4. A cancer that is in stage 0 is very small. The stages increase as the cancer spreads and damages the breast tissue. Stage 4 breast cancer indicates that it has spread to other body parts.

## How do you treat or manage male breast cancer?

The treatment for male breast cancer is the same as for female breast cancer and may include:

- Surgery - a procedure whereby the doctor removes the tumour and some surrounding healthy tissue, called a lumpectomy, or a procedure where the entire breast or a significant portion of it is removed. Patients with stage 0, or I breast cancer typically undergo lumpectomies, whereas wide-spread disease calls for mastectomy.
- Chemotherapy - is a drug used to either kill or shrink cancer cells. It can be administered intravenously or as pills that you take orally.
- Hormonal therapy - prevents the hormones that cancer cells need to grow from reaching them.
- Radiation therapy - high-energy rays (similar to X-rays) are used to kill cancer cells or stop them from increasing.
- Targeted therapy (Biological therapy) - identifies and kills particular cancer cells using drugs or other substances. Compared to chemotherapy or radiation therapy, targeted therapies typically impact healthy cells less.

## Follow-up care

To monitor the response to treatment, promote an active lifestyle, determine whether the breast cancer has advanced, and manage any health issues the patient may have as a result of treatment, follow-up care is necessary. The first two to three years of follow-up care for patients with early or locally advanced disease (Stage 0-III) include obtaining a medical history and scheduling physical exams every three to four months. After that, it is extended to 6 to 12 months up to 5 years, after which it is renewed annually.

## How do you prevent male breast cancer?

Male breast cancer is not preventable, but lifestyle changes can reduce the risk.

- Maintaining a healthy weight.
- Be physically active and exercise regularly.
- Avoid alcohol or limit alcohol intake.

## What is covered under PMB level of care?

Treatable breast cancer is included in the Prescribed Minimum Benefit (PMB) regulations under Diagnosis and Treatment and Pair (DTP) code 950J. Treatable cancers are defined in the PMB regulations as solid organ malignant tumours where:

- they involve only the organ of origin and have not spread to adjacent organs
- there is no evidence of distant metastatic spread
- they have not, by means of compression, infarction, or other means, brought about irreversible and irreparable damage to the organ within which they originated (for example, brain stem compression caused by a cerebral tumour) or another vital organ
- or, if points (i) to (iii) do not apply, there is a well-demonstrated five-year survival rate of greater than 10% for the given therapy for the condition concerned.

Regardless of which benefit option a member or beneficiary is on, the medical scheme must pay for the diagnosis, treatment, and care costs of treatable breast cancer. Screening through a physical breast examination, consultations with doctors and other health professionals, surgery, radiology, pathology, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy are included in what the medical scheme must cover.

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