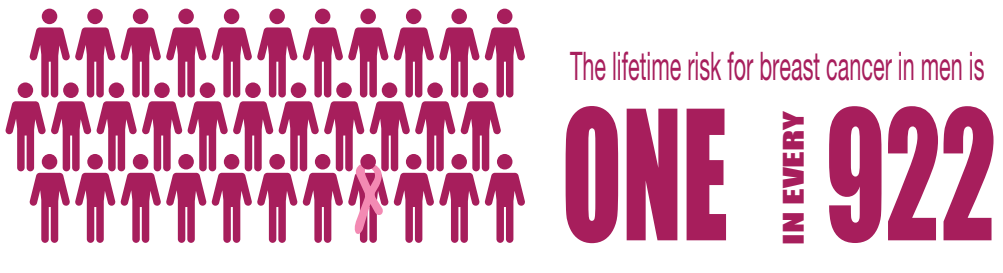
BREAST CANCER

What is breast cancer?

- Breast cancer is a malignant (cancerous) tumour that develops in the breast when cells begin to grow out of control, invading surrounding tissues, and even spreading (metastasize) to other areas of the body.
- Not all lumps or tumours of the breast are cancer. In fact, most breast lumps are benign and not life threatening.

Who is affected by breast cancer?

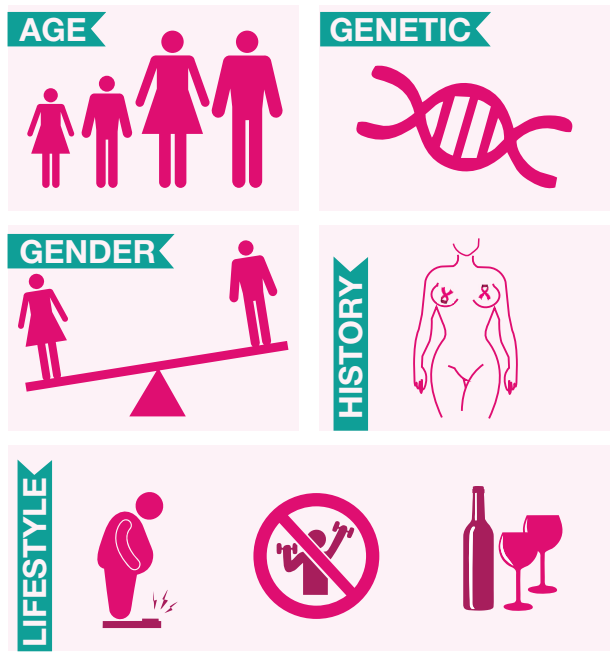
- Breast cancer is the most common cancer among women worldwide, including South Africa.
- Both women and men can get breast cancer.



What are the risk factors for breast cancer?

For most women diagnosed with breast cancer it is not possible to identify specific risk factors (other than being a woman and growing older).
However, several factors have been linked to an increased risk for breast cancer, including:

- A history of breast cancer in close family relatives, or a personal history of previous breast cancer.
- Starting menstruating early in life (before 12), or starting menopause late in life (after 55).
- Having your first child after 30 years of age, or having no children at all.
- Inherited changes (mutations) to certain genes, such as BRCA1 and BRCA2.
- Having dense breasts.
- Not being physically active.
- Being overweight or obese after menopause.
- Drinking 2 or more alcoholic drinks a day.
- Taking birth control pills (oral contraceptives).
- Using combination hormone therapy after menopause for more than 5 years.



How do I screen for breast cancer?

- **Breast self-examination:** Examine your own breasts at the same time every month (about one week after your period ends) to look for any changes such as lumps, pain or changes in the skin.
- **Clinical breast examination:** Have your breasts examined by a healthcare professional at least once a year.
- **Mammogram:** A mammogram is an x-ray of the breast and every woman older than 40 years of age should have one every 1 – 2 years.

SUPPORTING MEN AND WOMEN WITH *BREAST CANCER*

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