FACTS FOR LIFE

When You Discover a Lump or Change

A step-by-step guide:

1. I've found a lump or change in my breast. Now what?

First of all, do not panic. Most lumps are *not* cancerous. In younger women, lumps are often related to menstrual periods. Most often, they go away on their own by the end of your cycle. But, don't ignore any change in your breast. It is best to see your doctor to have it checked.

2. What will my doctor do?

Your doctor will ask about your personal and family medical history. He/she will ask you about what you found. Show your doctor exactly where you noticed the lump or other change in your breast. Your doctor can tell a lot about a lump, for example, from its size, texture and its movement within the breast. Benign (non-cancerous) lumps often feel different from cancerous lumps. Your doctor may refer you to get a diagnostic test which can provide more information about the lump or change.

3. What kind of diagnostic tests will I need?

A mammogram is an X-ray image of the breast. It is used to find early signs of breast cancer. However, a diagnostic mammogram is used to examine lumps or changes in the breast.

Ultrasound uses sound waves to make images of the breast. It can help tell the difference between normal and abnormal breast lumps. Ultrasound can tell the difference between a liquid-filled cyst and a solid mass. It is often used in addition to a mammogram.

Your doctor will decide if one or more of these tests is needed.

4. How is a breast lump treated?

Sometimes an abnormal lump is a liquid-filled sac called a cyst. Doctors can drain cysts by inserting a very thin needle and removing the fluid. This is called a cyst aspiration and can be done in a doctor's office or a radiology center. Cysts are rarely cancerous.

If the cyst does not collapse all the way, or if the fluid in the cyst contains blood, the doctor may examine the cells and fluid from the cyst with a microscope. Based on what is found, your doctor may order a follow-up mammogram, ultrasound or biopsy.

5. What about breast MRI?

Breast Magnetic Resonance Image (MRI) uses magnetic fields to create an image of the breast. It can sometimes detect cancers that are not seen on mammograms. It is often used in breast cancer diagnosis and staging.

5. What can diagnostic tests show?

The results of diagnostic tests may show:

- The breast change is not cancer. (You can return to your normal screening plan).
- The abnormal tissue is probably not cancer. You need to return for another screening in 4 to 6 months.
- A biopsy is needed to tell whether or not the breast change is cancer.

For more information, visit www.komen.org or call Susan G. Komen®'s breast care helpline at 1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636) Monday through Friday, 9 AM to 10 PM EST.

7. Will I need a biopsy?

If the lump is solid, a biopsy might be needed to remove some cells or a small amount of tissue. The tissue is examined under a microscope to see if it is cancer. Usually, a needle biopsy is done first. It can show whether or not cancer cells are present. If there is a chance the biopsy needle missed the suspicious area or more tissue is needed to check for cancer, a surgical biopsy will be done.

7. What happens next?

If the lump is not cancer, you may have a benign breast condition. Benign breast conditions are not cancer. Yet, some may increase the risk of breast cancer. Your doctor will talk to you about the breast cancer screening plan that is right for you.

If you have breast cancer, your doctor will talk with you about your treatment options.

If your doctor finds nothing abnormal, but you still feel something is wrong, it is a good idea to get a second opinion. Although a lump or change may be nothing to worry about, you will have the peace of mind of a second opinion.

Resources

Susan G. Komen®
1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636)
www.komen.org

American Cancer Society
1-800-ACS-2345
www.cancer.org

National Cancer Institute's Cancer Information Service
1-800-4-CANCER
www.cancer.gov

Related fact sheets in this series:

- Biopsy
- Benign Breast Conditions
- Breast Imaging Methods
- Mammography