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# Heart to Heart

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## Update on Breast Cancer

(Second of Two Parts)

### Is Fibrosystic Disease of the breasts pre-malignant?

In majority of cases, Fibrocystic Disease is benign and does not become cancerous at a later stage. However, the condition called virulent adenosis or intraductal hyperplasia of the breast is associated with an increased incidence of cancer transformation. This is why no lump or nodule should be taken for granted.

### Is rough handling of the breast bad?

It is obvious that trauma to any part of body is not good. The breasts are very sensitive to trauma. Biting them or mashing them could lead to bruising and injury to the mammary glands. They are to be treated gently, and with respect.

### If the mammogram is positive, what then?

There are two options: localize the lesion (the lump) mammographically and do a biopsy, or, monitor and follow the lesion with xeromammograms, or a series of mammogram. Majority of specialists favor doing a biopsy.

### What is the other type of biopsy?

The other type of biopsy is called open biopsy, or excisional biopsy by surgery. Needle biopsy is obviously simpler, less invasive, but hitting a small target with a needle could lead to sampling error, thus missing the lesion. Many also believe that a positive needle biopsy should be confirmed by an open biopsy, since the surgeon has to do surgery on the breast anyway. So, why even do needle biopsy in the first place? This is still controversial but the medical logic is clearly convincing that, in general, a needle bopsy is the prudent initial diagnostic procedure.

## **Is bilateral mastectomies done for cancer prevention?**

Bilateral mastectomies (surgical removal of both breasts) to prevent breast cancer have been advocated for those women who have very strong family (generation) history of breasts cancer, involving great grandmothers, grandmothers, aunts, mothers, and sisters. The cumulative risk of women in the general population to developing breast cancer is 10.2% (a little more than one in every ten women). With a strong family history, however, this increases the risk to threefold (about 30.6%). The best guide is the expert recommendation of the physician.

## **Do breast enlarging creams cause cancer?**

There is no study that shows the frequently advertised breast enlarging creams or lotions cause cancer. Time will tell. But why take the chance? For one thing, they are not effective in enlarging the breasts as the manufacturers and vendors claim they are. Instead of wasting money in these products, save it for a medical consultation and/or for a mammogram when you need one.

## **What are the treatment modalities?**

Surgery is usually the first step after the diagnosis is confirmed, and the extent of the cancer is determined. Sometimes, the final evaluation could only be made during surgery. This usually includes removal of the cancer and nearby lymph nodes. Removal only of the lump (called lumpectomy) is becoming popular but most often the entire breast is removed. Surgery is usually followed by combination of any of the following: chemotherapy, radiation, or hormonal therapy. The use of this adjuvant therapy has increased the survival rate among today's breast cancer patients. In very early stage of the cancer, some physicians may elect to use a combination regimen: the drug tamoxifen and hormone treatment.

## **What if the patient refuses surgery?**

If the woman refuses the surgeon's recommendation for surgery, and/or for adjuvant therapy (chemo, radiation or hormonal), the situation becomes a hopeless, and certainly fatal one. Today, millions of women around the world are alive and well after surgery, and many following a combination of adjuvant therapy follow resection of the breast. Second to early detection, taking advantage of all the available modern treatment for this cancer is the only way to beat cancer of the breast.

## **Isn't mastectomy deforming?**

Any surgery that removes a part of our external body is disfiguring to an extent. Nowadays, breast-conserving surgery is an option, depending on the lesion.

**But life is precious and, if at all possible, should be preserved at all cost. In this modern day and age, where intelligence predominantly rules, especially in matters of health, society, and women in general, and even men, have wisely accepted the consequences of this surgical procedure involving them or their loved ones with more psychological understanding and compassion, realizing that the breasts are not all there is to life, femininity, marriage, and sex. With the available modern day prostheses (artificial breasts or implants), a woman could even have better appearing breasts than their original ones. Indeed, that ancient psychological barrier has been broken. And women, and society as a whole, are all the better for it.**