

Breast Cancer

Condition: Breast cancer is the growth of tumors, made up of abnormal cells, in the breast.

Background: Breast cancer is caused by mutations (changes) in certain genes that makes cells grow rapidly which in turn leads to the development of tumors. Tumors can be found in the tubes that carry milk to the nipple (ducts) or in the glands that make the milk (lobules). There are currently more than 2.8 million breast cancer survivors in the United States alone.

Risk Factors: Breast cancer occurs mostly in women, but men may also be diagnosed. Having a gene called BRCA increases a person's risk of having breast cancer. Other things that increase the risk of breast cancer include a family history of breast cancer, a high-fat diet, obesity, not having had children, first pregnancy after age 30, getting your period early, starting menopause late, estrogen therapy, and exposure to radiation.

History and Symptoms: Breast cancer may be discovered through a manual breast exam or from a routine mammogram. Sometimes there is a family history of breast or other cancers. Some women have symptoms such as pain, weakness, numbness, tingling, bladder and bowel problems, or changes in thinking and memory.

Physical Exam: The doctor will do a manual exam of the breast and also check to see if any of the lymph glands under the arms or in the neck and chest are larger than normal.

Diagnostic Process: Mammograms and/or other imaging studies such as a breast MRI are used to look for tumors. These screening studies are recommended to high risk patients beginning at age 40 years old and recommended every year to most women ages 45-54. Cells from the tumor are usually removed for testing (called a biopsy) to see if there are genes or receptors that can help predict whether you will respond to certain treatments. PET scans may be used to see if the cancer has spread to other parts of the body.

Rehab Management: Treatment may involve a combination of surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, and hormone therapy. If breasts are removed, implants may be used. A physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM&R) physician can help with rehab conditions after breast surgery and/or treatment which can include continued surgical pain, shoulder pain and decreased range of motion, fatigue, nerve pain, and decreased strength. A PM&R physician can create an individual treatment plan to help with these issues which often may include exercise, physical therapy, and medications. Exercise and physical therapy have many benefits including increased energy, mood, and strength. Medications may relieve pain or side effects from chemotherapy.

Other Resources for Patients and Families: Support from family, friends, and cancer support groups can help ease the stress of having breast cancer. [The American Cancer Society](http://www.americancancer.org) is one source of information.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is PM&R?

Physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM&R), also known as physiatry, is a primary medical specialty that aims to enhance and restore functional ability and improve quality of life to those with injuries, physical impairments or disabilities affecting the brain, spinal cord, nerves, bones, joints, ligaments, muscles and tendons. PM&R physicians, known as physiatrists, evaluate and treat the whole body, maximize patients' independence in their daily life and are experts in designing comprehensive, patient-centered treatment plans to empower patients to achieve their goals. By taking the whole body into account, they can accurately pin-point problems, decrease pain, assist in recovery from devastating injuries and maximize overall outcomes and performance with non-surgical and peri-surgical options. To learn more, visit www.aapmr.org/aboutpmr.

What makes PM&R physicians unique?

PM&R physicians' training focuses not just on treating medical conditions, but on enhancing the patient's performance and quality of life in the context of those medical conditions. They focus not only on one part of the body, but instead on the development of a comprehensive program for putting the pieces of a person's life back together – medically, socially, emotionally and vocationally – after injury or disease. PM&R physicians make and manage medical diagnoses, design a treatment plan and prescribe the therapies that physical therapists or other allied therapists perform or that are carried out by the patients themselves. By providing an appropriate treatment plan, PM&R physicians help patients stay as active as possible at any age. Their broad medical expertise allows them to treat disabling conditions throughout a person's lifetime.

Why see a PM&R physician?

A PM&R physician will thoroughly assess your condition, needs, and expectations and rule out any serious medical illnesses to develop a treatment plan. By understanding your condition and goals, you and your PM&R physician can develop a treatment plan suited to your unique needs.

How do I find a PM&R physician near me?

Visit www.aapmr.org/findapmrphysician or contact your primary care physician for a referral.