

## Breast Cancer Myths Debunked!

*Myths to ignore about Breast Cancer*

by Dr Lavina Bharwani, M.D. Consultant in Oncology



**There are so many rumors and controversies among women surrounding breast cancer—what really causes it, what really prevents it—that it can be hard to know whom to believe.**

Just because a friend swears that wearing a bra can cause breast cancer doesn't mean it's true. And if you think that you're not at risk because there's no breast cancer in your family, you might be mistaken. The truth is that researchers still do not know what *causes* breast cancer—only that certain factors, such as obesity or drinking too much alcohol—may increase risk.

*What are your beliefs about breast cancer? Are your beliefs based on truth or popular beliefs?*

After reading this article, I hope you will make smart choices and reduce your risk.

### The Myth

**Finding a lump in your breast means you have breast cancer.**

#### The Truth

If you discover a persistent lump in your breast or any changes in breast tissue, it is very important that you see a physician immediately. Sometimes women stay away from medical care because they fear what they might find. Take charge of your health by performing routine breast self-exams, establishing ongoing communication with your doctor, and scheduling regular mammograms.

### The Myth

**Small-chested women have a lower risk.**

#### The Truth

Your bra size doesn't play a role in whether or not you get breast cancer.

All breast cancers develop in the cells that line the ducts or lobules—the parts that make milk and carry it to the nipple—and all women have the same number of these, regardless of breast size. What makes breasts bigger or smaller is generally the amount of fat and stroma (fibrous tissue), which research shows have little impact on cancer odds.

### Profile of Dr Lavina Bharwani

Dr. Lavina Bharwani has been a consultant with Johns Hopkins Singapore since September 1, 2006. Prior to joining Hopkins, Dr. Bharwani was an Assistant Professor of Medicine in the Division of Hematology/Oncology at Baylor College of Medicine in the USA.

She was trained in Internal Medicine as well as Hematology/Oncology at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas and is American Board Certified in Internal Medicine, Hematology and Medical Oncology. Dr. Bharwani comes to Singapore with extensive experience. Dr. Bharwani's areas of interest include breast cancer, gynecologic and gastrointestinal malignancies.



## The Myth

Breast cancer always appears as a lump.

### The Truth

Having lumps is part of the symptoms and not necessary are cancerous.

That said, any lump or breast symptom (especially from the list below) that does not go away should be checked by a doctor.

- ***A change in how the breast or nipple feels or looks***
- ***A lump or thickening in or near the breast or in the underarm area***
- ***Breast pain or nipple tenderness***
- ***A change in the size or shape of the breast***
- ***A nipple or skin that turns inward into the breast***
- ***Feeling warm to the touch***
- ***Scaly, red, or swollen skin of the breast, areola, or nipple, perhaps with ridges or pitting that resembles an orange peel***
- ***Nipple discharge***

## The Myth

Mammograms prevent or reduce your risk of breast cancer

### The Truth

Regular mammograms will not prevent or reduce your risk of breast cancer. They just detect breast cancer that already exists. That's why it's important that all women have an annual breast exam performed by a doctor and pay close attention to their own bodies to spot potential changes as early as possible. Getting a high-quality mammogram and having a clinical breast exam on a regular basis are the most effective ways to detect breast cancer in its earliest stages.



## The Myth

Young women don't get breast cancer.

### The Truth

While it's true the disease is more common in postmenopausal women, however breast cancer can affect people of any age.

## The Myth

Deodorant and antiperspirants cause breast cancer.

### The Truth

Skipping these toiletries won't keep your breasts cancer free.

Rumors claimed that antiperspirant prevents you from sweating out toxins, which can then accumulate in the lymph nodes and cause breast cancer.

A second rumor speculated that certain chemicals in antiperspirants, such as aluminum and parabens, may cause breast cancer because there is a lower prevalence of the disease in developing countries where women don't use these products. However, toxins are not usually released through sweat, and in Europe, where antiperspirants are not widely used, the rate of breast cancer is higher than it is in the United States.



### The Myth

Wearing a bra increases your cancer risk.

#### The Truth

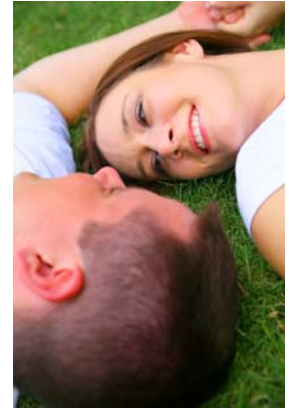
There is no good scientific or clinical basis to support the claim that plain or underwire bras cause breast cancer. This rumor appears to have started after a book called *Dressed to Kill* suggested that bras obstruct toxin-laden lymph fluid from flowing out of the breast. However, this was speculation based on a survey and no scientific evidence.

### The Myth

Having a family history of breast cancer means you will get it.

#### The Truth

While women who have a family history of breast cancer are in a higher risk group, most women who have breast cancer have no family history. If you have a mother, daughter, sister, or grandmother who had breast cancer, you should have a mammogram five years before the age of their diagnosis, or starting at age 35.



### The Myth

If I'm diagnosed with breast cancer, it means I'm going to die.

#### The Truth

Doctors are doing quite well at treating breast cancer. When caught early, most women are long-term survivors. Breast cancer that has metastasized, or spread to other parts of the body, poses the greatest challenge, although women with metastatic breast cancer often live for years with their disease.

### The Myth

Mammograms are unbearably painful.

#### The Truth

Is it comfortable? No. But it doesn't need to be excruciatingly painful, and most women will say it's not. Pre-menopausal women should schedule their exam for the first two weeks of their menstrual cycle, when their breasts are less tender. If you find mammograms too painful, talk to the technologist performing it. The amount of compression used can vary, so the technologist can ease up on the squishing if it's unbearable. Just keep in mind that more compression leads to a better image for the radiologist to read - so there's a payoff to that bit of discomfort.



## *Advice for you to remember*

Every woman wants to know what she can do to lower her risk of developing breast cancer. If you have no personal history of the disease, you want to do what you can to stay clear of it. And if you have had breast cancer, you never want to get it again.

You can control some risk factors. For example, if you are **overweight**, you can seek to lose excess pounds, which may reduce your risk of breast cancer. You can also make informed choices about the medicines you take.

**Regular screening** tests for breast cancer, such as an annual mammogram and a breast exam during your annual checkup, allow you and your doctor to ensure that your breasts are as healthy as they can be. Screening also increases the likelihood that your doctor will find breast cancer early, when it's most treatable.

## Your Vital Information

Johns Hopkins Singapore International Medical Centre is here to:

- Provide exceptional health care services that respect your dignity, needs and priorities
- Arrange complex diagnostic discussions with our consultants
- Give you support and appropriate care

### Contact Us

**+65 6880 2222**

Email to us: [appt@imc.jhmi.edu](mailto:appt@imc.jhmi.edu)

[www.imc.jhmi.edu](http://www.imc.jhmi.edu)

For enquiries about our hospital and services, or requests to interview our medical and paramedical experts, please contact us at:

Department of Public Affairs, Marketing & Education  
Tel: +65 6880 2206  
email: [petertay@imc.jhmi.edu](mailto:petertay@imc.jhmi.edu)