

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

This dictionary defines words that you may hear or read while going through a breast health concern. This is not a complete listing of medical terms. If you have a question about a word that is not listed, ask your health care provider to explain it to you.

A

Adjuvant Therapy: Treatment given in addition to the primary treatment.

Autologous Peripheral Stem Cell Transplantation: A procedure in which peripheral stem cells are removed from a patient, stored as the patient receives high-dose chemotherapy, and re-infused into the same patient. Stem cells are the basic blood cells that lead to the development of red cells, white cells, and platelets.

B

Benign: Implies a non-cancerous growth or tumor.

Biopsy: A procedure, surgical or non-surgical, in which tissue samples are removed from the body, for examination under a microscope, to find out if cancer or other abnormal cells are present.

Bone Marrow Transplant: Intravenous (IV) transfusion of bone marrow cells designed to establish marrow and immune function in patients with malignant or nonmalignant disorders. The bone marrow can be from a matched (related or unrelated) donor or the patient's own bone marrow (autologous).

Breast Reconstruction: Surgery that rebuilds the contour of the breast after the primary surgery has removed cancerous cells. May use implants, or other tissues from the woman's body.

C

Carcinoembryonic Antigen (CEA): A blood test for women with metastatic (widespread) cancer that can help determine if treatment has been effective. Not used for screening.

Chemotherapy: Treatment with drugs to destroy cancer cells.

Clinical Breast Exam: A breast exam performed by a health care provider.

Clinical Trial: Research studies to test new drugs or procedures on patients or to compare current standard treatments (medications, procedures) with others that may be equal or better.

Colposcopy: A visual inspection of the cervix done using a large microscope called a colposcope. An acetic acid (vinegar) solution is painted on the cervix, causing any abnormal areas to turn white. If whitened areas are seen during the exam, the clinician may remove a small piece of the tissue for a biopsy.

Cryotherapy: A procedure that freezes and destroys abnormal cells on the cervix.

Cyst: A fluid-filled sac most commonly felt on palpation.

D

Digital Mammography: An x-ray mammography system that produces digital images using a computer receptor in contrast to images produced on radiographic film.

E

Endocervical Curretage (ECC): Removal of tissue from the inner canal of the cervix.

G

Genetic Risk Counseling and Testing: A method used to determine an individual's risk of disease that can pass genetically (such as some breast cancers) by examining the history and genetic material (blood cells) of the family.

H

Hormone Therapy: Treatment of cancer by removing, blocking, or adding hormones.

Hospice: Supportive, palliative treatment, involving a multi-disciplinary team including: nurses, social workers, chaplains, physicians and family. The goal is not to extend the length of life, but to control and improve quality of life. It can be offered in an at-home setting or a hospice facility.

Human Papillomavirus (HPV): A sexually transmitted infection that causes lesions in the vagina and cervix. More than 50 types exist, and some of these are linked with cervical cancer.

I

Imaging: A technology to produce a picture of the inside of the body. Includes mammogram, ultrasound, CAT (computerized axial Tomography), MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) and x-ray.

In Situ Breast Cancer: A tumor that has not grown beyond the site of origin and not invaded neighboring tissue.

L

Localized Breast Cancer: Cancer that is confined to the breast.

Loop Electrosurgical Excision (LEEP): A procedure that can diagnose and treat cervical abnormalities. A thin wire loop emits low-voltage radio waves that excise tissue from the cervix.

Lumpectomy: This procedure removes the breast mass and may be followed by radiation therapy. Most surgeons also remove and test some of the underarm lymph nodes to check that the cancer has not spread.

Lymphedema: Swelling in the arm caused by excess fluid that collects after lymph nodes and vessels are removed by surgery or treated by radiation.

Lymph Nodes: Small bean shaped tissue, located along the lymphatic vessels.

Lymphatic System: The tissues and organs that produce and store lymphocytes and the channels that carry lymph fluid.

M

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI): An imaging technique that uses a powerful magnet to transmit radio waves through the body. The images appear on a computer screen as well as on film. Like x-rays, the procedure is physically painless.

Malignant: A term that designates a cancerous or abnormal growth.

Mammogram: A low-dose radiation x-ray technique especially designed to detect breast cancer.

Mastectomy: Surgery to remove most or part of the breast and surrounding tissues (muscle, skin, lymph nodes).

Metastatic: The spread of cancer cells to distant areas of the body (such as bones or brain) by way of the blood stream or lymphatic system.

P

Palliative Treatment: Therapy that relieves symptoms, such as pain, but does not cure the disease. Its main purpose is to improve quality of life.

Pap Test: A screening test that examines cells collected from the cervix for the presence of cancer, infection, inflammation, and other abnormalities.

Positron Emission Tomography (PET): The PET machine is used to detect how fast the body uses glucose. If glucose is being consumed faster in certain parts of the body, it may indicate the presence of a cancerous tumor. Except for an injection of radioactive material mixed with glucose, this is a painless, non-invasive procedure.

R

Radiation Therapy: The use of high energy radiation from x-rays and other sources to destroy cancer cells after surgery and minimize the chance of cancer recurrence.

Rehabilitation: Activities to adjust, heal, and return to full productive life after injury or illness. This may involve physical restoration (such as a prosthesis, physical therapy), counseling and emotional support.

Risk Factor: Anything that increases a person's chance of developing disease. Some known risk factors for breast cancer include: family history of breast cancer (especially in a mother or sister), beginning menstrual periods at a young age (before 12), late menopause, never having children or having one's first child after age 30, and maintaining a high fat diet, among others.

S

Screening: The search for disease in people at risk without any symptoms in hope of finding disease at a very early and more treatable phase. Screening tests for breast cancer include a clinical breast exam and mammography.

Second Opinion: The process of seeking the advice of another medical doctor with similar credentials to assist in the decision-making process.

Support Group: A collection of lay people, often with some common experience.

U

Ultrasound: An imaging technique that uses high-frequency sound waves to define a part of the body. Painless and without radiation, this technique is best for differentiating between breast cysts and tumors.