

# Breast/Cervical Cancer Terms

## Definitions of words you may hear from health care providers

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Why do we hear the word “screening” instead of “exam”? Is a “Pap” test the same as a “pelvic” exam?

Medical providers and health educators often use words like “cervix” and other names to describe parts of a woman’s body. They may even tell you that your test results are “benign,” instead of saying the result is not cancerous. It is easy to get confused by words that usually only medical people speak.

Below are brief definitions for some medical terms used in the breast and cervical health field. You do not need to remember them. However, you may find it helpful to refer to them whenever you want to know how what a word means or how to pronounce it. Longer definitions can be found at the websites below.

### **Benign (beh-NINE)**

Not cancer. Benign tumors may grow large but do not spread to other parts of the body.

### **Biopsy (BY-op-see)**

The removal of cells or tissues for examination by a pathologist, a doctor who studies diseases. The doctor may study the tissue under a microscope or perform other tests on the cells or tissue. The most common types of biopsy procedures are: (1) incisional biopsy, in which only a sample of tissue is removed; (2) excisional biopsy, in which an entire lump or suspicious area is removed; and (3) needle biopsy: a sample of tissue or fluid is removed with a needle.

### **Cervical cancer (SER-vih-kul KAN-ser)**

Cancer that forms in tissues of the cervix (the lower, narrow end of the uterus that connects to the vagina). It is usually a slow growing cancer that may not have symptoms that can be found with regular testing. The two screening tests for cervical cancer are the Pap test and HPV test (which looks for the virus that causes cell changes).

### **Cancer (KAN-ser)**

A disease in which abnormal cells in the body grow out of control and it spreads. Cancer is named by the body part where the abnormal cells start and can spread to other parts of the body later.

### **Chemotherapy (KEE-moh-THAYR-uh-pee)**

Treatment with drugs that kill cancer cells.

### **Colposcopy (kol-POSS-koh-pee)**

Examination of the vagina and cervix using a lighted magnifying instrument called a colposcope.

### **Ductal carcinoma (DUK-tul KAR-sih-NOH-muh)**

The most common type of breast cancer. It begins in the cells that line the milk ducts in the breast.

### **Human papillomavirus or HPV**

#### **(HYOO-mun PA-pih-LOH-muh-VY-rus)**

A family of viruses that can cause abnormal tissue growth and is the main cause of cervical cancer. This virus can be passed from one person to another during sex.

### **Lumpectomy (lum-PEK-toh-mee)**

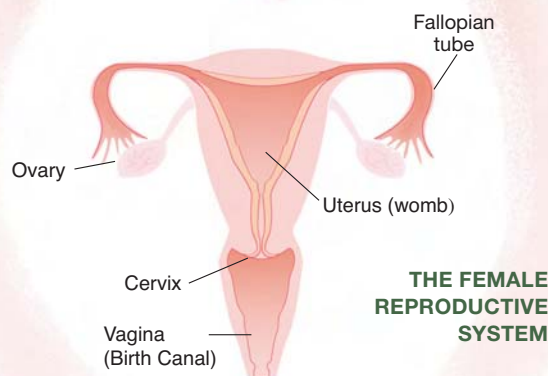
Surgery to remove abnormal tissue or cancer from the breast and a small amount of normal tissue around it. It is a type of breast-saving surgery.

### **Lymph node (limf node)**

A small bean shaped organ of the immune system found in different parts of the body like the neck, armpits and groin. The lymph node acts as a trap or filter for bacteria. They can become swollen when fighting an infection like strep throat or the spread of cancer.

### **Malignant (muh-LIG-nunt)**

Cancerous. Malignant tumors can invade and destroy nearby tissue and spread to other parts of the body.



Reference sites: <http://www.cancer.gov/dictionary/> • <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000913.htm#Definition> • <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000893.htm>

## Mammogram (MAM-o-gram)

A low-dose x-ray picture of the breast.

## Mastectomy (ma-STEK-toh-mee)

Surgery to remove the breast.

## Oncology (on-kol-uh-jee)

The branch of medicine devoted to the study, treatment, and cure of cancer.

## Pap test or Pap smear (PAP-schmeer)

A test used to find cancer of the cervix. A small swab is wiped on the cervix. The material on swab is examined under a microscope to see if it is healthy.

## Pelvic Examination

(PEL-vik eg-ZA-mih-NAY-shun)

A physical examination in which the health care professional will feel with his or her hands for lumps or changes in the vagina, cervix, uterus, fallopian tubes, ovaries, and rectum that can not be seen.

## Polyp (PAH-lip)

A growth that protrudes from a mucous membrane.


## Radiation (RAY-dee-AY-shun)

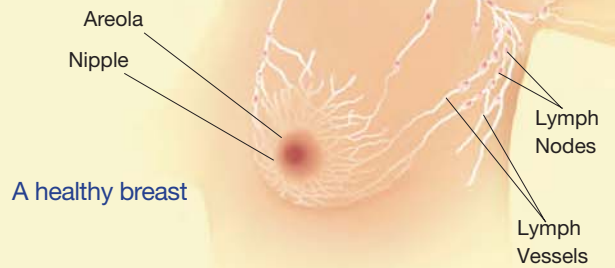
Energy released in the form of particle or electromagnetic waves. Common sources of radiation include radon gas, cosmic rays from outer space, medical x-rays, etc.

## Screening (SKREEN-ing)

Checking for disease when there are no symptoms. Since screening may find diseases at an early stage, there may be a better chance of curing the disease. Examples of cancer screening tests are the mammogram (breast), colonoscopy (colon), Pap smear (cervix), and PSA blood level and digital rectal exam (prostate).

## Ultrasound (UL-truh-SOWND)

A picture that can help doctors look inside a patient's body without using radiation and are faster than x-rays. Also called a sonogram. 



## Symptoms of Breast Cancer

Different people have different warning signs for breast cancer. Some people do not have any signs or symptoms at all. A person may find out they have breast cancer after a routine mammogram.

### Some warning signs of breast cancer include,

- ❖ New lump in the breast or underarm (armpit).
- ❖ Thickening or swelling of part of the breast.
- ❖ Irritation or dimpling of breast skin.
- ❖ Redness or flaky skin in the nipple area or the breast.
- ❖ Nipple discharge other than breast milk, including blood.
- ❖ Pulling in of the nipple or pain in the nipple area.
- ❖ Any change in the size or the shape of the breast.
- ❖ Pain in any area of the breast.

Keep in mind that some of these warning signs can happen with other conditions that are not cancer.

If you have any signs that worry you, be sure to see your health provider right away.

For more information visit,  
[http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/basic\\_info/symptoms.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/basic_info/symptoms.htm)



A Pap test can also show non-cancerous conditions, such as treatable infection or inflammation.