



Breasts are one of the most vital parts of the female body, helping us nurture our children, enhance our femininity and give us those all-important womanly curves—and whether they're big, small, round or teardrop-shaped, each pair is unique and precious, making it all the more important for us to take care of them.

In 2010, almost 1.5 million people around the globe were informed that they had breast cancer—the most common cancer in women in the world—and experts predict that this number is only set to rise, with the American Cancer Society estimating 226,870 new cases of invasive breast cancer to be diagnosed in women in 2012 in the USA alone. Yet while the incidence rate may be increasing, the survival rate is improving: Today, the five-year survival rate for breast cancer stands at 85 per cent in the USA and 78 per cent in the UK, and more than eight out of 10 women survive the disease beyond 10 years¹—a stark contrast from the Middle East, where it's still a major issue.

While a push in awareness campaigns has helped in recent years, there still exists a certain stigma associated with cancer in the region, and because it is seen as a taboo to admit to having cancer—let alone breast cancer—

many cases often go undiagnosed until a dangerously late stage. Fear of visiting a doctor—particularly a male doctor—and unwillingness to discuss the situation with peers are also listed as factors: A worrying fact when we consider that experts claim deaths caused by cancer could decrease by almost a third if detected and treated early.² In Saudi Arabia, for instance, around 70 per cent of breast cancer cases are only diagnosed in the late stages³, while in 2007, breast cancer was shown to be the number one cause of death for women in the UAE. Meanwhile, a study by the Sheikh Hamdan Bin Rashid Al-Maktoum Award for Medical Sciences' Centre for Arab Genomic Studies also found that women in the UAE tend to develop the disease at least a decade earlier than our Western counterparts.

The future holds promise, however, with awareness campaigns spreading throughout the region in recent years; organisations like the UAE's Higher National Committee for Breast Cancer Control (established by the Ministry of Health in 2006) and Saudi Arabia's Zahra Breast Cancer Association and Abdul Lateef Charitable Screening Centre help fund research and treatment for patients, work to provide free or affordable check-ups, and above all, spread awareness.

YOUR BREASTS: An Owner's Manual

And it's not all bleak: "One of the most surprising things that people don't know about breast cancer is that we may not be able to prevent [it] but we are very good at treating the disease. In this way, five times more women get breast cancer than actually die from breast cancer. So, there are worse cancers to have!" says Dr. Houriya Kazim, Medical Director and Specialist Breast Surgeon at Well Woman Clinic and founder of Brest Friends.

One thing is clear: Taking care of our breasts should be a priority in every woman's life, be it their health, vitality or even the way they look, and we've got the experts to tell you how.

SELF-AWARENESS

According to Dr. Kazim—who was the UAE's first female Emirati surgeon—women should be conducting a Breast Self-Exam at least once a month; "But remember, a breast exam should be a part of a woman's total body awareness—we need to know how our body looks and feels in general, so the breast exam would only be a part of that."

With so many options available in terms of screening—mammograms, →

Women in the UAE are developing breast cancer a decade younger than those in the West—and *anyone* can be diagnosed with this disease. *GHME* speaks to the experts about caring for your pair... **By Yi-Hwa Hanna**

sonograms, ultrasounds or a good old physical check—it can be hard to know which one is right for you. “It’s actually quite simple: First, check yourself monthly as part of a full body awareness [exam]. Second, make sure that you go for a clinical check with a GP or gynaecologist at least once a year if you’re sexually active—from the time a woman is sexually active, we suggest that they have a gynaecological check-up once a year, and as part of that, a good gynaecologist or GP would examine the breasts—which is what we refer to as a clinical breast exam. Third, [make sure you get] screening mammograms from the age of 40. Other investigations will be added as the physician deems necessary based on these three things, family history and so on,” explains Dr. Kazim.

Since breast cancer *can* be a hereditary condition, genetic testing is another option, but Dr. Kazim believes this is only required for specialised cases. “Genetic testing for breast cancer is available in the UAE for at-risk women, but remember, genetics accounts for less than 10% of the cases of breast cancer that we see. There are families out there that a genetic test would be necessary for, and it can be done relatively easily (through a simple blood test). However, it is not used as a screening test for the general public,” she says.

While genetics may play a small role in our chances of getting breast cancer, Dr. Kazim does point out that there are other factors that can increase your risk. “The main risk factors that we know of are firstly, being a woman, and secondly,

getting older. Breast cancer is more common in women than men and the longer you live, the higher your chance of getting breast cancer. Other risk factors include not having children (or having them late in a woman’s reproductive life), not breast-feeding or taking hormone replacement therapy. One which may be relevant to women in the MENA area is the association between a low vitamin D level and breast cancer. Vitamin D is mostly produced in our body when our skin is exposed to the sun. Many women in this region are covered, so although we have a lot of sun here, our skin does not get exposed to it as much as it should in order to keep our vitamin D levels in the normal range,” Dr. Kazim says.

CHOOSING A DOCTOR

When it comes to choosing a doctor to treat breast cancer, the experts’ advice is to seek exactly that—a doctor who specialises in breast cancer patients. “Many [people] are surprised to know that the medical and surgical management of breast cancer is standardised universally. So [for] any doctor who treats breast cancer for a living, whether that doctor is in Dubai, the USA, the UK or anywhere else, the management would be the same. So, the “right” doctor would be one who specialises in treating such patients,” says Dr. Kazim.

If you’re considering any aesthetic enhancements to your breasts, it’s equally as important to choose a good doctor. “For plastic surgery procedures of any kind, [women] should seek out a surgeon who is

Board-Certified,” says world-renowned plastic surgeon Dr. Marc Mani. “In the USA, there is the American Board of Plastic Surgery. A safe bet for any surgeon internationally is to look for members of the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ISAPS). It’s also always helpful to ask friends for a direct referral to a surgeon they had breast work from and were happy with the results,” he says.

A BEAUTIFUL SET

Keeping your breasts looking and feeling good comes hand in hand with maintaining their health, and many women fear change during menopause and after childbirth. “Changes in the breasts that are hormonal or pregnancy-related usually involve the breasts getting larger and then smaller, and consequently “drooping” a bit more. For these changes, we perform breast lift operations, and I use an implant in these situations if the woman wants larger breasts,” Dr. Mani says, continuing: “I do not routinely encourage implant use if there is a lot of breast tissue, because with the newest lift operations I am able to sculpt the breast tissue to raise it up more, and avoid the implants completely. The best thing to do to maintain breasts without surgery is to try to maintain an even body weight rather than gaining and losing a lot of weight. Weight fluctuation tends to add fat to the breast and when it goes away, the skin stays—resulting in more drooping. Also, I recommend wearing a good support bra when exercising, particularly with running or other

PERT AND PERKY A Leading Plastic Surgeon’s Top 10 Tips on Keeping Your Breasts Beautiful

ONLY IN GHME!

World-renowned plastic surgeon Dr. Marc Mani, who is based in Beverly Hills, CA, was named one of the USA’s ten leading surgeons by Forbes Magazine. We asked him for his top 10 tips on keeping our breasts looking and feeling their best—whether they’re natural or not:

- 1 Avoid prolonged sun exposure (sun damage kills elastin fibres which help the skin stay young).
- 2 Keep the skin well-hydrated with a good moisturiser.
- 3 Maintain an even body weight—breasts can get bigger with weight gain and then smaller when

the weight is off—but the extra skin is still there [even after weight loss].

- 4 Avoid drinking caffeine as much as possible—caffeine can cause fibrocystic changes in the breasts which can be painful.
- 5 Take any changes in your breast such as pain or unusual discharge seriously, and see your doctor if you have any concerns at all.
- 6 Examine your breasts for lumps regularly, especially if you have a family history of breast cancer.
- 7 Get a mammogram whenever recommended by your doctor,

usually age 35 to 40, and then repeated at intervals determined by the findings on the first one.

- 8 Keep your breast implants soft by massaging them regularly (unless your plastic surgeon says not to).
- 9 If your breasts are too large, see a plastic surgeon. Breast reductions can now be done with less scarring and a much perkier shape.
- 10 Wear a good support bra when working out.



Dr. Mani visits the UAE several times a year, for consultations and surgical procedures at the American British Surgical & Medical Centre in Dubai. To find out when he’s next in town or to book an appointment, contact them at 04 297 5544.



size. [This] can cause you many problems including neck, shoulder and back ache," she says. Both M&S and K-Lynn offer free bra fitting services, and they recommend clients come in every six months to check that the fit and style of bra they are wearing complements their shape and size.

Tiffany says wearing the right bra can make you look kilos lighter and will give you support in all the right places. "If it fits right, you shouldn't even feel that you have it on; it should feel like a second skin. We've witnessed so many women having an 'A-ha!' moment in our fitting rooms when they slip into the right size!" she says. "A good-fitting bra should fall horizontally back to front, without any arching in the back and no sagging in the front," she explains, adding: "The cups should mould perfectly around your bust, without any spilling or poking. The underwire should fall outside the natural line of your bust, outlining it to maintain support and lifting to create a beautiful silhouette under any clothes. Finally, the centre gore should lie flat against your chest; you shouldn't be able to lift it away. The best way to tell if your bra fits is to raise your arms: Your bra should stay perfectly in place."

high-impact workouts. The bouncing from jogging tends to stretch out the suspensory ligaments that hold the breast tissue up, and a bra helps mitigate this effect."

If you *are* considering surgery, be it a breast lift or breast augmentation, and implants are to be involved, Dr. Mani reassures us that silicone implants are perfectly safe. "Nowadays I use almost exclusively silicone implants because they are proven very safe and they usually look—and always feel—more realistic than saline implants. But saline implants are fine if the patient has a particular desire to choose them over silicone," he says. Many women fear that if they have breast surgery, they will lose feeling in their nipples. If this happens, "it is unlikely from augmentation, although it is a theoretical risk of the procedure. It's more likely from a reduction or from reconstruction," Dr. Mani explains.

Another popular concern is the notion that breast augmentation surgery requires a "top-up" procedure, so to speak, within a number of years—but Dr. Mani says this isn't always necessary. "[A woman] should seek out a plastic surgeon's opinion on having revision surgery whenever there is an issue she wants to correct," he says, adding: "There is a common misconception that breast implants 'require' maintenance surgery every ten years. While the average

“Women who exercise more than five hours a week can decrease their risk of invasive breast cancer by 20 per cent”

re-operation rate of women with breast implants is about 25 per cent within the first ten years, this needn't be done if the implants are soft and she has no complaints."

THE RIGHT FIT

According to Tiffany Youssef, a Bra Fitting Expert at K-Lynn Lingerie, most women are not aware that bra sizes can change up to eight times in a lifetime due to weight gain and loss, pregnancy and general changes in body shape. "Throughout these changes, we need different bra styles to offer the proper support; starting with training bras in our teen years, push-up and balconnette bras in our 20s and 30s, nursing bras for pregnancy, wireless bras with breathable fabric as we hit menopause, and eventually a bra that will lift as we say hello to gravity! We have our hormones to thank for changing our cup size as well, not just throughout the years but every month," she says. Julia Mercer, Technical Manager at Marks & Spencer, agrees: "A staggering 80 per cent of us are wearing the wrong bra

FINDING A LUMP

So you go for regular check-ups, maintain a healthy lifestyle and take care of your breasts—but what happens if you still find a lump? "What happens [next] is pretty standard," says Dr. Kazim. "We call it the 'triple assessment' and it consists of the following steps: First, the doctor will feel the lump as part of a clinical examination. Second, we scan it through a mammogram, ultrasound and/or MRI, and third, we take a small amount of tissue from the lump by means of a needle (the needle biopsy). There is a video on our website, www.brestfriends.org, which uses real breast cancer survivors who walk you right through the process," she explains.

While the step-by-step process of dealing with this may be straightforward, the emotional side of such a burden can be difficult to cope with. "Whilst we'd like to be rational and not jump to conclusions about what the lump could mean, it's at times impossible not to be assaulted by several feelings and be really overwhelmed, and possibly think very catastrophic →

thoughts. Allow some space and time to reflect what is going on; tune in, acknowledge it and try not to get stuck. This may facilitate some defusion of the pressure and anxiety, and we are less likely to get stuck thinking the worst, able to move on and [deal] with the process,” says Dr. Tara Wyne, Clinical Psychologist and Clinical Director of The Lighthouse Arabia. “Enlist the support of loved ones, to help you have the courage to book appointments and certainly do this in a timely way, but not rush into it so that you are spinning and not able to hold on to yourself,” she advises.

If a lump proves to be cancerous, it can be even harder to keep your emotions in check. “The objective is to feel as safe as you can through a very challenging journey,” says Dr. Wyne, continuing: “There are bound to be numerous emotions from fear, to anger, to uncertainty, being overwhelmed, wishing to escape or change the reality, questioning why it’s happening, concern for our survival or fear for what it may mean to our loved ones. One cannot hope to and should not try to prevent these emotional states. It is important that we reflect and give voice to these, otherwise this maelstrom of emotions will remain locked within us and create tremendous instability and insecurity. Try to check in with yourself daily, perhaps either through journaling your thoughts or by taking quiet time daily to reflect on how you are feeling and coping with that day. This will allow you to acknowledge or deal with it.” Dr. Wyne also thinks it can be helpful to

“Recovering from breast cancer isn’t just about your body—it’s also about healing your mind and heart”

reach out to and connect with others going through similar experiences. “Ask the cancer treatment centre you are attending to put you in touch with support groups, or try to access virtual online support groups. Reading about other peoples’ experiences can sometimes help to give you perspective on what may lie ahead and normalise your experience,” she advises.

If you have a friend or relative who has been diagnosed with breast cancer, lending your support every step of the way is key—no matter how she feels or reacts. “Cancer is a highly emotive subject; we shouldn’t

LOWER YOUR RISK While there are some factors that are out of your control, there are ways you can actively reduce your risk.

1. TAKE CARE OF YOUR BODY
As fat cells create more oestrogen (which can stimulate breast cancer cell growth), overweight and obese women are at a greater risk. Head of Balance Wellness Club, Dr. Deepa Dhavjekar, says: “Ayurveda suggests a healthy diet to decrease risk. Avoid inorganic and packaged foods that can lead to development of synthetic hormones in the body.” Staying fit is also important—women who exercise more than five hours a week can decrease their risk of invasive breast cancer by 20 per cent.⁴ “Yoga helps with lymphatic circulation, and massages with castor or neem oil help prevent formation of cysts,” says Dr. Dhavjekar. Experts also suggest cutting back on alcohol intake, breastfeeding after you’ve had children, making sure you get enough sleep and limiting post-menopausal hormone use.

2. BE SELF-AWARE
The Susan G. Komen For the Cure foundation strongly advocates Breast Self-Awareness and suggests first to know your risk: Learn about your family health history, then talk to your doctor about your personal risk.

3. STAY VIGILANT ABOUT CHECK-UPS
Aside from staying aware of unusual changes, reactions or lumps in your breasts, experts recommend having a clinical breast exam at least once every three years starting at age 20. Once you hit age 40, a clinical breast exam in addition to a mammogram every year is recommended.



Next, get screened: Ask your doctor which tests are right for you. Finally, know what is normal for you. See your GP if you notice any of these changes: Swelling, warmth, redness or darkening of the breast; lumps, hard knots or thickening inside the breast or underarm area; dimpling or puckering of the skin; itchy, scaly sores or rashes on the nipple; pulling in of your nipple or other parts of the breast; nipple discharge that starts suddenly; new pain in one spot that doesn’t go away.

assume too much about how our loved ones feel. Be curious, ask her where she is with it, what it means to her and how she wants you to be. She may simply want someone to be by her side, others may want someone to discuss it all with or share their fears with immediately. It could be all these things, but at a pace dictated by them. Our main role is to make space for their feelings and experiences and not fill it up too much with our reactions and feelings,” says Dr. Wyne.

Even after successful treatment, the often surprising long-term effects of having and recovering from breast cancer can leave women in remission feeling frustrated or mentally exhausted—and the emotional journey can feel far from over. “Recovering from breast cancer isn’t just about your body—it’s also about healing your mind and heart,” says Dr. Wyne. “Many people perceive being given the all-clear as the end of dealing with cancer, but cancer has a legacy of its own which can

affect peoples’ lives in a dramatic way. Being told factually that you are cancer-clear does not immediately remove the impact, pain and losses a person has endured—they may be haunted by that burden for some time. Alongside this they have to remain vigilant to any symptoms or changes in their bodies that may signify recurrence; they must also continue to take medications, face changes [or] new limitations in their activities, abilities or lifestyles, which they have to learn to adjust to,” she says.

Dr. Wyne believes we have to weave the challenges and changes into our life story and our outlook, rather than trying to go back to the person we were pre-cancer: “Mindfulness of the legacy and impact, awareness of changes and respect for the challenges of life after cancer are important ways of being that can help people deal with frustrations and progress with their lives again.” ■