

# Researchers call for more awareness of male breast cancer as cases rise

October 3 2011

---



(Medical Xpress) -- Awareness of male breast cancer is low and most men do not even know they are at risk despite an increase in cases, reveals new research from the University of Leeds.

Breast cancer is very much seen as a female disease with around 48,000 diagnoses in women in the UK each year. However around 340 [men](#), equivalent to 30 football teams will be diagnosed with [breast cancer](#) each year and around 70 men will die.

Funded by Breast Cancer Campaign and Yorkshire Cancer Research, University of Leeds researchers reviewed [male breast cancer](#) cases in four Western countries; England, Scotland, Canada and Australia. In England, the incidence of male breast cancer was seen to rise over a 20 year period: from 185 cases in 1986 to 277 cases in 2006. This corresponds to a rise of one third from 0.5 to 0.7 cases per 100,000 of

the population.

Pinpointing an exact cause for this increase is difficult, according to Dr Valerie Speirs, who led the study.

"[Lifestyle changes](#) over the latter decades of the 20th century, leading to increased obesity, [physical inactivity](#) and development of a [binge drinking](#) culture may be contributing factors. Some of the same inherited [genetic changes](#) that increase the risk of women developing breast cancer are also thought to influence risk in men," she said.

Most of the information used to diagnose and treat men with breast cancer comes from studies of female breast cancer. The new data pointing towards a rise in cases, published in the on-line journal [Breast Cancer Research](#), provides impetus to study the biology of male breast cancer in more detail. Men need to get the right information, treatment and emotional support, the researchers concluded.

Dr Speirs and her colleagues now plan to examine the genes and proteins involved in male breast cancers to determine whether there are similarities or differences with female breast cancer. This may help pinpoint gender-specific differences which can be exploited to improve and develop treatments specifically targeted at men.

University of Leeds researchers are collecting and storing male breast tissue samples in the groundbreaking Breast Cancer Campaign Tissue Bank. Dr Speirs' ongoing work is also being supported by a new grant from Yorkshire Cancer Research.

"Many men are unaware they can be affected by breast cancer but this work has highlighted that the number of cases is gradually increasing. It must be stressed that the numbers are still extremely small - 150 times less than in women so we are certainly not talking about an epidemic.

However better awareness is needed," Dr Speirs said.

"Symptoms include discharge from the nipple that may be blood stained, swelling of the breast, a sore or ulcer in the skin of the breast, a nipple that is pulled or retracted into the breast or a lump under the arm. If you have any of these symptoms contact your GP straight away," she added

Baroness Delyth Morgan, Chief Executive, Breast Cancer Campaign said, "The study of breast cancer in men has been difficult in the past because of the relatively small number of cases. As early diagnosis and treatment is vital to increase the chances of survival, we need to raise awareness.

"The new Breast Cancer Campaign Tissue Bank, with a core centre in Leeds, will be invaluable to researchers to enable them to understand the molecular causes, similarities and differences between male and female breast cancer, as well as testing the effectiveness of existing and new treatments."

Dr Kathryn Scott, Research Liaison Officer with Yorkshire Cancer Research said "This is a fantastic example of two charities working together to advance the knowledge into this relatively unknown disease in men. Many men do not realise they can get breast cancer and, although still rare, the incidence has risen. It is important to raise awareness because early detection is often linked to a more successful outcome for cancer patients."

**More information:** Male breast carcinoma: increased awareness needed, White J, et al, is published in *Breast Cancer Care* [[doi:10.1186/bcr2930](https://doi.org/10.1186/bcr2930)].

Provided by University of Leeds

Citation: Researchers call for more awareness of male breast cancer as cases rise (2011, October 3) retrieved 13 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-10-awareness-male-breast-cancer-cases.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.