

Stage Zero Breast Cancer



Stage Zero Breast Cancer is the earliest form of breast cancer. Medically termed Ductal Carcinoma In Situ (DCIS), cancer cells are found inside the milk ducts (the canals that allow milk to move from the milk gland to the nipple) in the breast, but have not spread to the surrounding breast tissues or organs. “According to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), more than 100,000 new cases of breast cancer are diagnosed each year. However, there are no precise statistics on the incidence of DCIS in India,” says Dr P Raghu Ram, director of KIMS – Ushalakshmi Centre for Breast Diseases, Hyderabad.

Though Stage Zero Breast Cancer is not dangerous, it has the potential to spread to the surrounding tissues if left untreated. Based on the appearance of the cells under a microscope and on the rate with which they multiply, it can be divided into low grade and high-intermediate grade. “It is less likely for a low-grade DCIS to be an invasive breast cancer when compared to the high-grade DCIS. The treatment is based on the extent of the DCIS within the ducts and its grade,” he explains.

DCIS is difficult to detect as it does not have any symptoms. “Women must look out for a change in size, rash on or around the nipple, a painless lump, blood-stained discharge from the nipple, swelling under the armpit or a retraction of the nipple. Women above 40 years of age must have a mammogram done at least once in two years for early detection.”

DCIS is not life-threatening and has a long-term survival rate. But the number of women in India being diagnosed with DCIS breast cancer is low. Says the good doctor, “According to statistics from the World Health Organization, fewer than 5% of women undergo breast screening in India. The reasons are lack of awareness about the importance of early detection and the absence of an organised nationwide breast cancer screening programme.” The bottomline: Be breast aware, checking from an early age, and going to the doctor if you see any change at all. It’s likely to be nothing, but if there’s something there, you’ll have caught it in time.