

Beating Breast Cancer

Learning you have breast cancer can be a frightening experience. Easing the fear begins with understanding that not all breast cancers are the same and that some types, such as ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS)—also known as precancer or stage 0 breast cancer—are often highly treatable.

According to Stephen E. Karp, MD, director of Lahey Clinic's Breast Center, it is important to make the distinction between invasive types of cancer and noninvasive breast cancer. "Invasive breast cancers are cancers that have spread beyond the layer of tissue where they began and into the healthy, surrounding tissue," says Karp. "DCIS, however, is non-invasive, which means cancer cells are confined to the breast ducts and cannot spread to surrounding tissue or to other parts of the body."

The American Cancer Society (ACS) estimates that close to 50,000 new cases of DCIS will be diagnosed in the United States this year. In Massachusetts, approximately 7,000 new cases of breast cancer will be diagnosed—a quarter of which will be DCIS. According to the ACS, the high number of DCIS cases being diagnosed is directly linked to the increased number of mammography screenings being performed.

"At Lahey's Breast Center, 25 to 30 percent of the overall breast cancer cases we see are now DCIS," says Karp. "They are almost always discovered on a routine mammogram, before anything can be felt physically. This is why screening mammograms are so important...because we can catch and treat cancer earlier."

Once DCIS is suspected on a mammogram, a woman will usually undergo a minimally invasive procedure called an image-guided breast biopsy. Image-guided biopsies are performed in Lahey's Radiology Department using special X-ray, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), or ultrasound technology to help enhance the area to be biopsied and confirm or rule out a diagnosis.

Treating DCIS

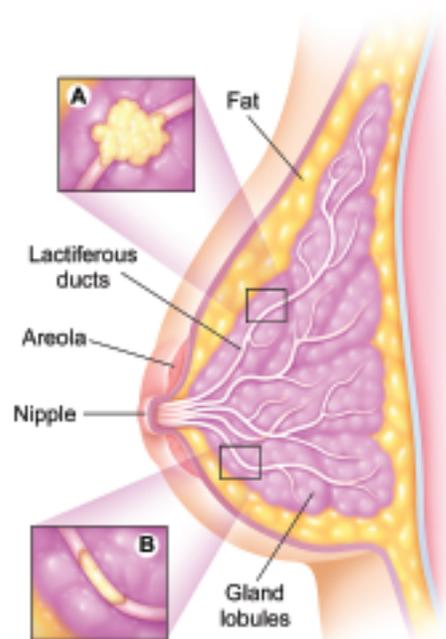
The most common treatment for DCIS is a lumpectomy, or breast-conserving surgery, followed by six to seven weeks of radiation. A lumpectomy is a surgical procedure to remove an area of breast tissue or a lump in the breast.

According to Karp, 99 percent of women diagnosed with DCIS who have a lumpectomy plus radiation are cured of their cancer. Statistics for a second cancer occurring in women treated for DCIS are also reassuring. "Again, when patients are treated with both lumpectomy and radiation, it can lower the chances of recurrence dramatically," says Karp.

"DCIS is a problem that we can treat," he adds. "I try to tell patients not to worry."

The Breast Center at Lahey Clinic offers the latest in mammography and minimally invasive biopsies, comprehensive treatments for breast cancer and benign breast conditions, genetic counseling and testing services, and risk assessment. To make an appointment at Lahey Clinic Medical Center, North Shore, call 978-538-4322, or at Lahey Clinic Medical Center, Burlington, call 781-744-8834.

See Page 5 for information about a clinical trial of a new treatment for DCIS.



Inset (A) infiltrating ductal carcinoma; (B) ductal carcinoma in situ.