

HER2-Positive Breast Cancer

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Among the fastest growing types of breast cancer, particularly among young women, is HER2-positive breast cancer. This unique cancer is one of the most aggressive breast cancers and, while it is treatable if detected in its earliest stages, it is a very serious form of cancer that some women do not survive. HER2-positive breast cancer is an acronym for the protein, Human Epidermal Growth Factor Receptor-2, which assists the rapid division and growth of cancerous cells.

In the United States, it is estimated that HER2-positive breast cancer affects as many as one in five breast cancer patients. If detected and treated early enough, recent advancements in medicine do help women survive this type of breast cancer at a much higher rate than in previous years. Herceptin, a drug commonly used to treat this cancer, is credited for greatly improving the survival rate of women with early stage HER2-positive breast cancer. Herceptin has also been credited with reducing the incidents of recurring breast cancer cells, as well. Prior to treatment with Herceptin, research indicated that women diagnosed with HER2-positive breast cancer had a much higher rate of breast cancer recurrence than women with other types of breast cancers.

With breast cancer being the second most deadly form of cancer in women, early detection of HER2-positive breast cancer is crucial. Particular to this type is the rapid rate by which cancer cells divide and spread, which takes place at a greater pace than all other forms of breast cancer. Researchers cite HER2 breast cancer as being more aggressive because of the rapid cell division, which makes cells harder to eradicate if not detected in time. Early detection advisories include routine self-examination and encourage women with genetic markers for this cancer to undergo immunohistochemistry testing, as well as fluorescence in-situ hybridization testing.

Women who develop HER2-positive breast cancer do so because of the presence of genetically programmed cells that overproduce the Her2 protein. This type of breast cancer is often detected by the presence of a lump in the breast. In some women, however, an early diagnosis is missed, as early symptoms are not present. HER2-positive breast cancer also strikes women at a younger age than other types of cancer. Being that HER2 breast cancer is such an aggressive type, along with Herceptin treatment, doctors also treat this it with chemotherapy or surgery to increase rates of survival and reduce the risk of recurrence.