

## **Breast Cancer Awareness among women in India**



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Sheryl Crow, a famous American musician, spoke in an interview given to Reader's Digest about the time she got diagnosed with breast cancer. She emphasized that you have to save yourself. Nobody else will be there. And this realization made her examine her life and care for herself.

Most women get petrified on getting detected with breast cancer. They feel that they have got a death warrant. This disease can be cured if it is found at the early stages. But the problem lies here. Unlike women in western countries, Indian women are clueless about it, and thus the disease goes unnoticed and comes to the surface when it turns deadly as hell. The pandemic has further hindered diagnosis and treatment and is likely to affect the survival rates negatively. In 1985, for the first time, October was introduced as National Breast Cancer Awareness Month. It was the first movement in the United States organized to draw attention to the dangers of breast cancer. Since then, campaigns to spread awareness about this disease have continued to thrive and multiply.

Breast cancer is the most leading cancer-causing death in women. Though Indian women are less prone to breast cancers than western women, the mortality rate is really high. As per the studies done by the National Cancer Registry Programme of India and GLOBOCAN 2018, breast cancer constitutes about 23.5% of all cancer-related deaths in Indian women. Almost one in four deaths due to cancer in women in India was due to breast cancer in 2018. This high mortality is because of late detection of breast cancer at locally advanced or metastatic stages. And also, 37.7% of all newly detected breast cancer cases in 2018 were in the age group of 25 to 49 years. We usually have a false notion that breast cancer is an illness of the elderly, but it is not so.

Several studies showed that most breast cancer cases get reported at the I or II stage of the disease in Western countries, while around 46% of such cases were diagnosed in advanced stages in India. Early diagnosis is necessary as per most researchers as a pathway to save life, and it acts as an essential method to improve the medical condition. Unavailability of high-quality primary level screening programs and of regional treatment centers, over-dependence on large tertiary cancer hospitals, huge out-of-pocket expense, and non-participation of women in existing programs are cited as few reasons behind the late diagnosis. Studies have found that the awareness among women about different signs, symptoms, and risk factors of breast cancer in India is low, contributing to late detection of the disease among them. It is reported that By 2030, breast cancer will be the reason behind maximum deaths among women in India than any other cancer. There is a shortcoming at every stage, from awareness to detection to diagnosis to counselling to treatment to overcome the disease.

Breast cancers are categorized into two types as lifestyle-influenced and faulty genes. Specific measures that can definitely lower breast cancer occurrence are a healthy and stress-free lifestyle, timely pregnancy, adequate lactation, and abstinence from tobacco and alcohol. Women with a family history of breast cancers are more susceptible to the disease. Such women should start screening mammograms ten years before the indexed age. That is, if someone close in your family had breast cancer at the age of 45, then she should start the screening at the age of 35. In typical cases, an early mammogram with ultrasound or clinical breast exam should be done annually from the age of 40. A clinical breast examination can be done every three years for women in their 20s and 30s. Though the disease cannot be fully rooted out, we can try to prevent it.