



# Living Well with AIMGA

VOL. 10 - BREAST HEALTH

Compiled by AIMGA's Health and Wellness Team

**HEALTHHUB FOR  
NEWCOMERS**



**Health Matters! Wellness Matters! Diversity Matters!**

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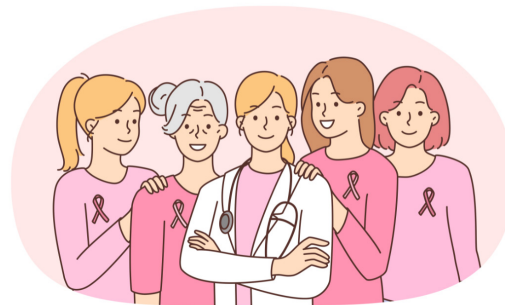
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## IMG SPOTLIGHT

OCTOBER:  
Breast Health

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among Canadian women, with an estimated 1 in 8 developing it during their lifetime. Breast cancer also can develop in men, not just women. Thus, breast health is a very important topic to touch on, especially in the month of October, which is marked as Breast Cancer Awareness Month. This volume of the Living Well with AIMGA Newsletter will focus on everything from prevention to treatment to recovery.

Sources: [Canadian Cancer Society, 2023](#)



## Getting Started: Tips & Resources



- [Understanding Breast Cancer Video](#)
- [Breast Cancer Awareness Month Video](#)
- [What Are the Signs and Symptoms of Breast Cancer? Video](#)
- [Know Your Normal Video & Information](#)
- [6 Ways To Take Back Control After A New Breast Cancer Diagnosis](#)
- [Young People Living with Breast Cancer](#) - although 83% of cases occur in women aged 50+, early onset is possible ([PHAC, 2023](#))
- [What Happens During a Mammogram?](#)
- [How To Talk To Someone With Cancer](#) | Katie Deming | TEDxReno
- [Dense Breasts Canada](#) has released a series of photo essays highlighting Canadians affected by breast cancer. They will be releasing a portrait a day through the month of October across their [social media](#) platforms.
- [Advocacy Screening Toolkit](#)

# HOT TOPIC: A SILENT STRUGGLE: UNVEILING THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF BREAST CANCER



Breast cancer is not only a physical battle but also a profound emotional and mental challenge that significantly impacts the well-being of individuals facing this diagnosis. The psychological toll of breast cancer extends beyond the realms of medical treatments, often leading to heightened stress, anxiety, and depression. The fear of the unknown, coupled with rigorous treatments like chemotherapy and surgeries, can trigger a range of emotions that affect mental health. Incorporating mental health into the discourse surrounding breast cancer is crucial to addressing the holistic needs of patients.

Support systems play a pivotal role in navigating these challenges. It is essential for those affected by breast cancer to not feel isolated. Connecting individuals with a network of emotional support, be it through support groups, counseling services, or even online communities, fosters a sense of belonging and understanding. No one should face breast cancer alone, and emphasizing mental health in the support process helps individuals cope with the emotional intricacies of their journey.

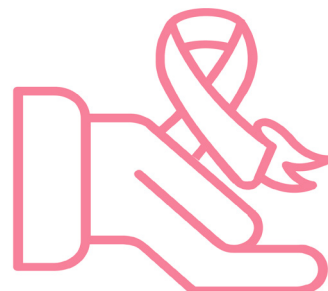
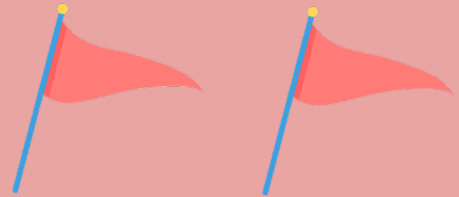
For those at a high risk of developing breast cancer, proactive measures can make a significant difference. Encouraging regular check-ups, genetic counseling, and fostering open communication with healthcare professionals ensures that individuals feel empowered and supported in managing their risk. The psychological impact of living with the knowledge of high-risk status is profound, and by creating an environment that acknowledges and addresses these concerns, we contribute to a more comprehensive approach to healthcare.

Cancer can be hard to understand and coping with a diagnosis can be overwhelming. It can help to talk to someone to give you current, reliable information. Check out this [Cancer Information Helpline](#), a national, toll-free service for people with cancer, their caregivers, their families and their friends, the general public, and healthcare professionals.

**Sources:** [American Cancer Society](#); [Breastcancer.org](#); [Fortin et al., 2021](#)

## RED FLAGS

- 1 Some breast cancers (5%–10%) are caused by an inherited [gene mutation](#) in BRCA1 AND BRCA 2 genes. If you have a family history of breast cancer, talk to your doctor about hereditary breast cancer and next steps such as genetic testing.
- 2 When doing a self-breast exam, if you come across a new breast mass, lump, or other change, consult your family doctor immediately. The most common [warning signs](#) and indicators of breast cancer include: a lump in the breast or armpit, breast thickening or swelling, pain, rash, irritation, or skin dimpling, nipple retraction or discharge, or scaling, peeling or flaking skin on the breast.
- 3 Having dense breasts can decrease the effectiveness of mammography and increase your risk for breast cancer. Dense breasts are common and normal, with about 43% of women ages 40+ having dense breasts. Learn more, including [five reasons](#) why your breast density matters and find out your own [breast density score](#).
- 4 Breastfeeding can be awkward at first! Try out some of these [techniques](#) to find a comfortable position for you. If your baby is not gaining at least 5 to 7 ounces per week since your milk started coming in, consult your family doctor.
- 5 When you drink alcohol, a small amount gets into your breast milk. The amount of alcohol in breast milk depends on the amount of alcohol in the blood. It takes about [2 hours](#) after having one drink for the alcohol to no longer be a concern for your baby. Thus, do not give your baby fresh breast milk for at least 2 hours if you've had one drink, 4 hours if you've had two drinks, etc. If you plan to drink more than a few, do so after breastfeeding's been established for about a month and then "[pump and dump](#)". This is when you pump your milk and throw it away.
- 6 If you have severe nipple pain or significant cracking of the nipples that makes it too painful to nurse, your baby is likely not latching on correctly. Try breastfeeding on the less sore side or even use an electric breast pump until your nipples have healed. Consult your doctor for more information.







## HEALTH REMINDERS!

- Certain [risk factors](#) such as family history, race, ethnicity, sex, and age are unmodifiable but important to be aware of when it comes to prevention and early detection. Know your family history. A woman's risk for breast cancer is higher if she has a mother, sister, daughter, or multiple family members on either her mother's or father's side of the family who have had breast or ovarian cancer.
- There are also modifiable risk factors that can assist with [prevention](#), including being physically active, avoiding alcohol, and having a healthy diet. You can focus on these key areas to stay healthy and reduce your cancer risk.
- Booking regular [mammograms](#) every 2 years is critical for women aged 45-74. Ask your doctor about this or contact a breast cancer screening program in your province / territory. If you are at high risk, your doctor will likely recommend that you get regular mammograms after the age of 30.
- Complete regular self-breast exams to look for unusual signs and symptoms. A breast self-exam takes only a few minutes and can easily be built into your daily routine. You can do a breast exam when you're getting dressed for the day, lying in bed at night, or when taking a shower. The [best time](#) to examine your breasts is usually 1 week after your menstrual period starts, when your breasts are least likely to be swollen or tender.
- It is important to be familiar with your breasts and "[know your normal](#)". This will help you notice any changes.
  - 1) Examine Your Breasts in a Mirror With Hands on Hips;
  - 2) Raise Arms and Examine Your Breasts;
  - 3) Look for Signs of Breast Fluid;
  - 4) Feel for Breast Lumps While Lying Down;
  - 5) Feel Your Breasts for Lumps While Standing or Sitting.
 If you are experiencing any abnormalities that don't feel right to you, contact a health care professional. For more information on how to do your own self-exam, read more [here](#).
- If you're not sure if a [medication](#) is safe while breastfeeding, pump, label and store expressed breast milk until you check with your health care provider.

## DID YOU KNOW?

- The [youngest known survivor](#) of breast cancer is Aleisha Hunter from Ontario, Canada. At only three years old, Aleisha underwent a complete mastectomy in 2010 to treat her juvenile strain of breast cancer.
- Nearly ¼ people diagnosed with breast cancer experience [depression](#). People who are diagnosed with breast cancer also are more likely to experience at least one or more of the following: fatigue, insomnia, memory loss, mood swings, anxiety, PTSD.
- For new mothers considering breastfeeding, some [studies](#) show that breastfeeding for at least one year is associated with a decreased risk of breast cancer.
- Research suggests supplemental screening for women with [dense breasts](#). Additional screening, such as ultrasound, can increase detection of early-stage cancer hidden by dense breast tissue.
- Over the past 25 years, there has been a higher prevalence of breast cancer cases in the [eastern provinces](#) compared to central and western provinces.
- Breast cancer prevalence has been shown to be the highest among those living in the [highest income](#) neighbourhoods. For colorectal and lung cancers, the pattern is reversed.
- Breast cancer is found to be the most common 25-year prevalent cancer in all [geographic regions](#) except Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.



# MYTH OR FACT?

Sources: [Nc](#)

Click on each myth bubble to find out true, evidence-based information.

No lump means  
no breast cancer.

Mammograms  
cause breast  
cancer.

Finding a lump in  
your breast means  
that you have  
breast cancer.

Breast cancer only  
affects middle-aged  
or older women.

If you have the  
BRCA1 or BRCA2  
gene mutation,  
you'll develop  
breast cancer.

It is not okay  
to switch from  
breastfeeding  
to formula feeding.



## COMMUNITY RESOURCES & ORGANIZATIONS

Talk to an information specialist 1-888-939-3333.

Cancer can be difficult to understand and coping with it can be stressful. It can help to talk to someone you can trust to give you current, reliable information.

- **Canadian Cancer Society** – [What is Breast Cancer?; Connect with our Online Community; How can we help?](#)
- **After Breast Cancer** – Helping breast cancer graduates
- **Rethink Breast Cancer** – Join the movement
- **Cancer Control Alberta** – Prevention to treatment to beyond
- **Community Services Locator** – Find services like support groups, wigs and prosthesis, financial help, places to stay and more...
- **Cancer Care Alberta** – Information for patients and families, community and primary care providers, and research and analytics
- **Wellspring Cancer Support Alberta** – Offers free programs and services that meet the emotional, social, and practical needs of people living with cancer – those diagnosed, caregivers, and kids.
- **Canadian Breast Cancer Network** – Breast Reconstruction
- **Breast Cancer Canada** – Passionate about advancing research
- **CURE Foundation** – Know your normal
- **Breast Cancer Supportive Care** – Aim to empower individuals with breast cancer, their families and those at high risk
- **More Breast Cancer Resources**



# IMG SPOTLIGHT



**Sherry Qian**

**Sherry Qian** completed her medical education at Shanghai Jiao Tong University in China and practiced as an OBGYN specialist following her residency training in Shanghai. Upon relocating to Canada, Sherry studied health information management and delved into oncology research at the Tom Baker Cancer Centre. To expand her knowledge in pediatric oncology, Sherry transferred to Alberta Children's Hospital in 2022, working as a Clinical Research Associate. Eager to assume more responsibility in research, she is currently in the process of applying for a master's program in Healthcare Epidemiology at the University of Calgary.

Drawing from her research experience in the breast tumor group, Sherry is an advocate for the importance of breast cancer

screening after the age of 50. Additionally, she aims to highlight the essential roles of regular exercise, a balanced diet, and effective anxiety management in promoting overall breast health.

### **Skills gained from AIMGA:**

"I honed my communication skills in the Canadian healthcare context through AIMGA's MCAP program. The learning sessions also heightened my awareness of Conmed's framework, offering practical insights for its application in real-world healthcare scenarios. These skills enhance my ability to navigate and contribute effectively to the Canadian healthcare system, ensuring optimal patient care."

### **Biggest Lesson Learned & Advice for Other IMGs:**

"Reflecting on my journey, I recognize the significance of joining AIMGA earlier. As a professional immigrant, this platform has been invaluable for engaging with peers, learning from their experiences, and making the most of the resources it offers. When reclaiming our professional practice, remember the importance of a balanced approach, signifying that our efforts will yield benefits in various ways. It's never too late to improve; all our endeavors contribute to evolving into a better version of ourselves."

## OTHER AWARENESS DAYS



### BREASTFEEDING AWARENESS WEEK (October 1-7)

#### Purpose:

Join AIMGA in celebrating National Breastfeeding Week from October 1st to 7th. We recognize and promote this campaign to raise awareness about the importance of protecting, promoting, and supporting breastfeeding mothers here in Canada.

#### Key Facts:

- Just over **91%** of mothers start breastfeeding, but 1/7 stop before their baby reaches one month of age.
- Breastfeeding provides unmatched health benefits for babies and mothers. It is the “[clinical gold standard](#)” for infant feeding and nutrition. Infants who are breastfed have a lower risk of asthma, obesity, SIDS, GI infections, etc. Mothers who breastfeed have a lower risk of breast and ovarian cancer, high blood pressure, and type 2 diabetes.
- [Colostrum](#) is the first milk produced in the early days after your baby is born. This substance is very high in proteins, vitamins, minerals and infection-fighting antibodies that help your baby grow healthy and strong.

#### Additional Links:

[Breastfeeding Committee for Canada](#); [More About Breastfeeding](#); [AHS – Feeding Your Baby](#)



### WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY (October 10)

#### Purpose:

To raise awareness of mental health issues around the world and to mobilize efforts in support of mental health. The theme for this year is “mental health is a universal human right”. Mental health is a basic human right for all people. Everyone around the world has a right to the highest attainable standard of mental health!

#### Key Facts:

- Good mental health is important for overall health and wellbeing
- 1/8 people in the world live with a mental disorder, such as anxiety or depression.
- The presence or absence of a mental illness is NOT a predictor of mental health; someone without a mental illness could have poor mental health, just as a person with a mental illness could have excellent mental health. Mental health includes our emotions, feelings of connection to others, our thoughts and feelings, and being able to manage life’s highs and lows.
- An increasing number of adolescents and young adults are affected by mental health conditions

#### Additional Links:

- Check out [Volume 1 of our Living Well with AIMGA newsletter](#) for more information and resources;
- Check out this great [video](#) that explains mental health and what it is;
- This year’s campaign [theme](#) and other mental health [facts](#) (WHO);
- Combat Mental Health Stigma with a Shift Towards [People-First Language](#);
- [Mental Health vs Mental Illness](#)

A special thanks goes out to the following international medical graduates: **Aisha Ashraf, Oluwadamilola (Dami) Jaiyeola, Eno Chude, Lateefat Hammed Imam, Luz Aida Zapata-Cardona, Sherry Qian, Mehvish Noreen, Mirian Nwankwo, Ajibola Akanni, and Maria Patria for their additional contributions.**

# AIMGA



**AIMGA  
CALGARY**



Crescent Centre  
Suite 202  
1409 Edmonton Trail NE  
Calgary, AB T2E 3K8



403.520.7730



[www.aimga.ca](http://www.aimga.ca)