

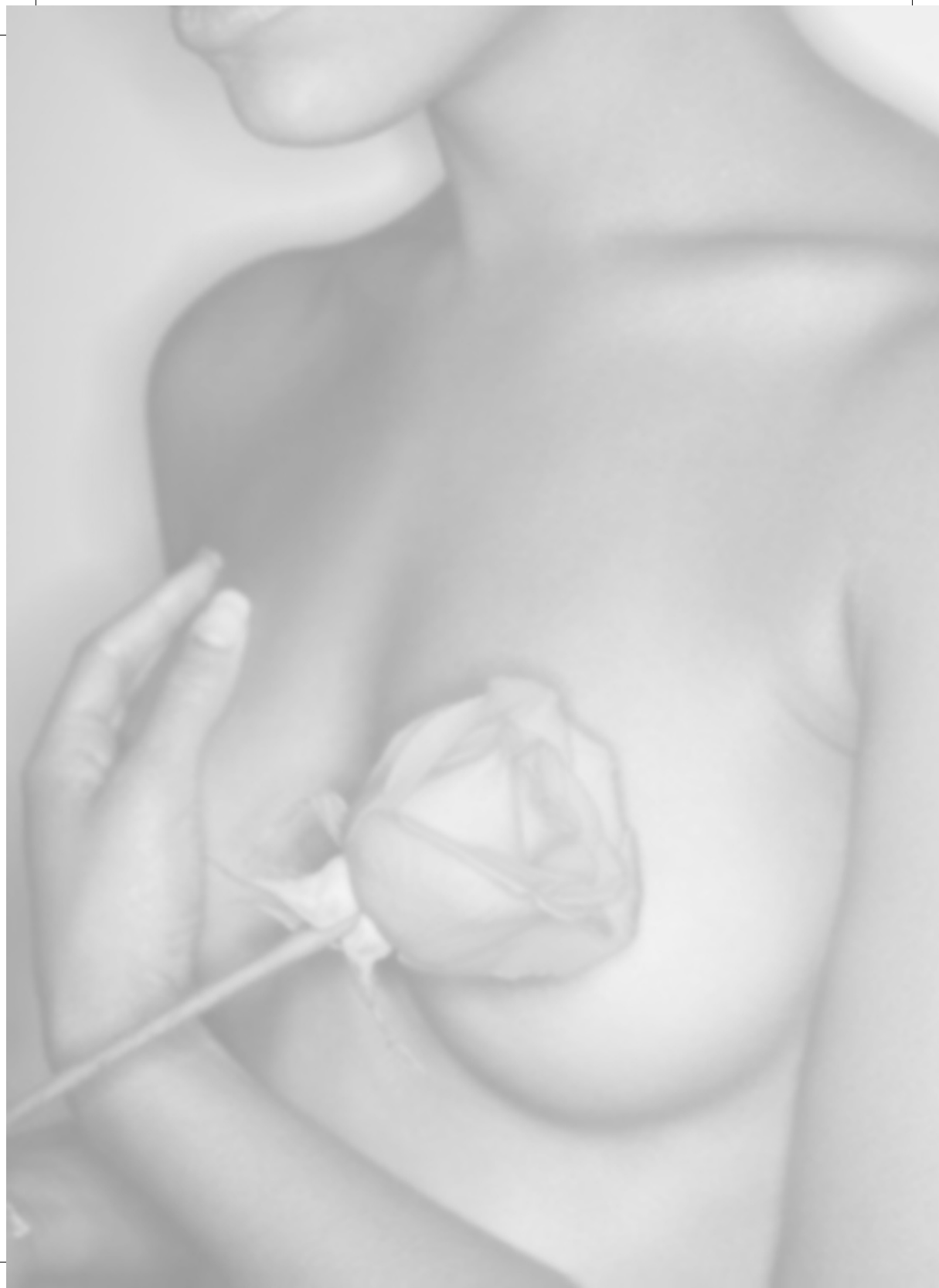


LEGA ITALIANA PER LA LOTTA CONTRO I TUMORI

prevenire è vivere



Woman and the breast



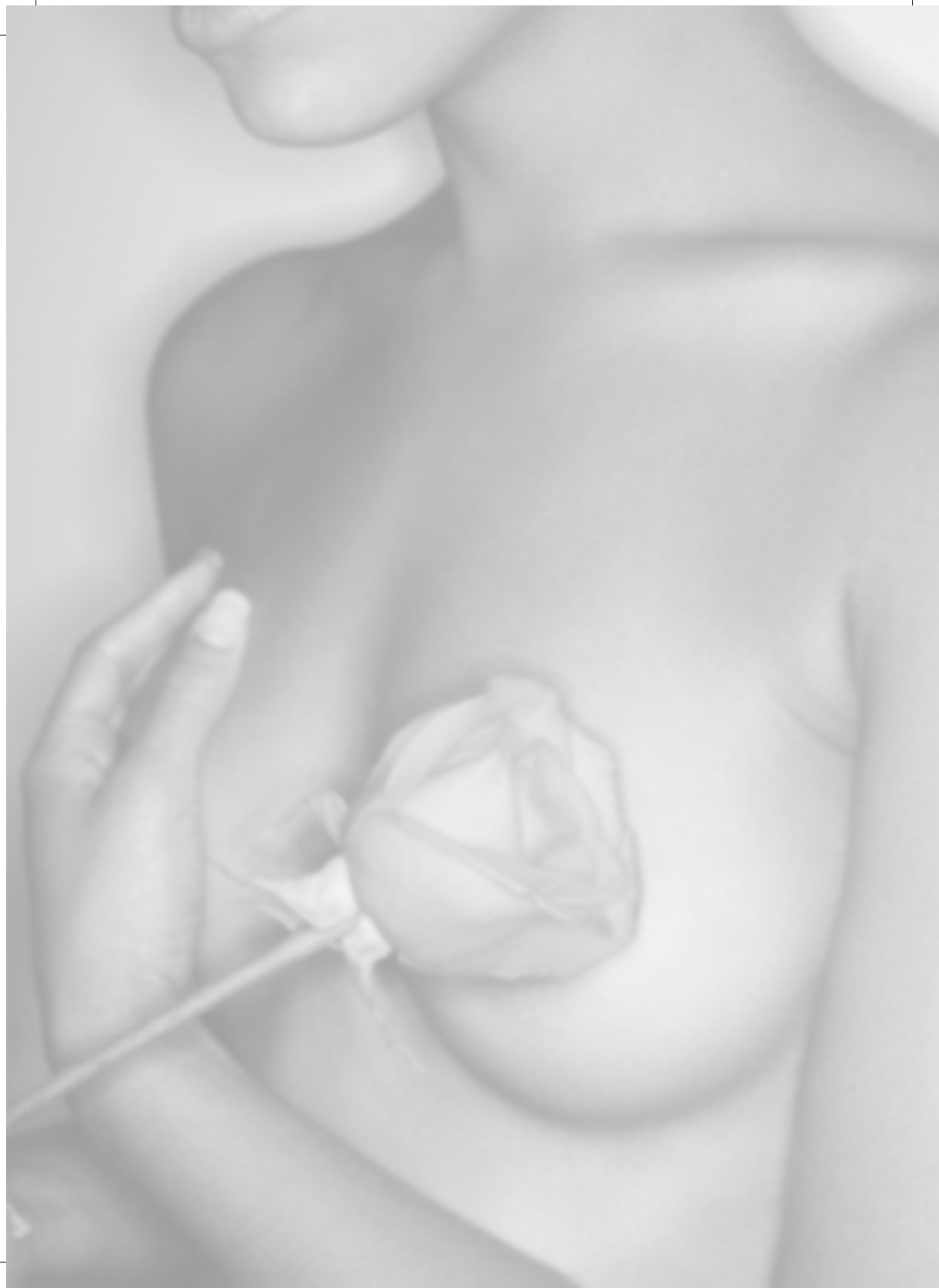
Preface

I am convinced that in the vast field of the battle against various forms of cancer, informing the community is one of most effective practice. As a result all the campaigns, carried out towards a widespread awareness of the problem, have had great success; in fact in most cases an earlier diagnosis has registered greater recovery rate.

In particular in breast cancer, the most common amongst women, we have had a greater reduction of mortality, despite the increase of new cases every year. Consequently, nowadays we deal with this problem much more effectively.

The Italian Association against Cancer (Lega Italiana per la Lotta contro i Tumori) is responsible for informing the community of what it is essential and extremely useful to do in this battle against cancer. Its duty is also to report about all the new discoveries that researchers, scientists and general practitioners have been working on. Clearly information and response of this issue involves everyone of us.

Prof. Umberto Veronesi
Scientific Director I.E.O. Milan
President of Scientific Committee LILT



Introduction

Amongst the 4 “big killers”: lung cancer, colon and rectum cancer, prostate cancer and breast cancer, the last one is definitely the most serious.

Despite scientific progress, advanced technologies, early diagnosis, innovative therapies with the use of “intelligent drugs” and most of all the high commitment of researchers in the bio-genetic field, in recent years in our country there have been more than 10.000 deceases every year and there has been an increase of incidence, with about 36.000 new cases of breast carcinoma.

On the other hand, however in the last 20 years, huge steps have been done both in terms of improved chances of recovery and better life quality. Moreover, lately women have been more actively and directly involved in this whole process.

This booklet, available to everybody, highlights the particular attention that the Italian Association against Cancer (Lega Italiana per la Lotta contro i Tumori) give to women, considered exceptional strength for the “vital growth” of our society.

This particular publication, contrary to earlier ones, acknowledge the role of a woman as “protagonist” and author of her own destiny, even towards this pathology. Nowadays women, if properly informed, play a decisive role in recovering from breast cancer also thanks to new advanced technologies and sophisticated therapeutic methods, based on the principle of “preserving as much as possible”.

Prof. Francesco Schittulli
President of The Italian Association
Against Cancer

What is breast cancer?

- *Breast cancer is the most frequent malignant cancer amongst women, particularly in developed countries.*
- *The large majority of breast cancer is constituted by carcinomas. There are two types of carcinoma: invasive and in situ. The former spreads through the tissues and it gives metastases. The carcinoma in situ does not give metastases, as it is at the first stage of the disease. Every year in Italy about 36.000 women fall ill and more than 10.000 die from breast cancer, diagnosed and treated previously.*
- *There has been an increase of cases of carcinoma in the last years and, if it increases at this rate, about one million of new cases are expected in the near future all over the world.*
- *However, in the last twenty years there has been a decrease of mortality. This is thanks to an earlier diagnosis and to improved therapies, but also to a further cognitive sensitization toward this problem. This trend shows the importance of diagnosis and prevention as it allows prompt and effective therapies and equal treatments at national level.*

Danger related to the most frequent nodular alterations of breast according to age.

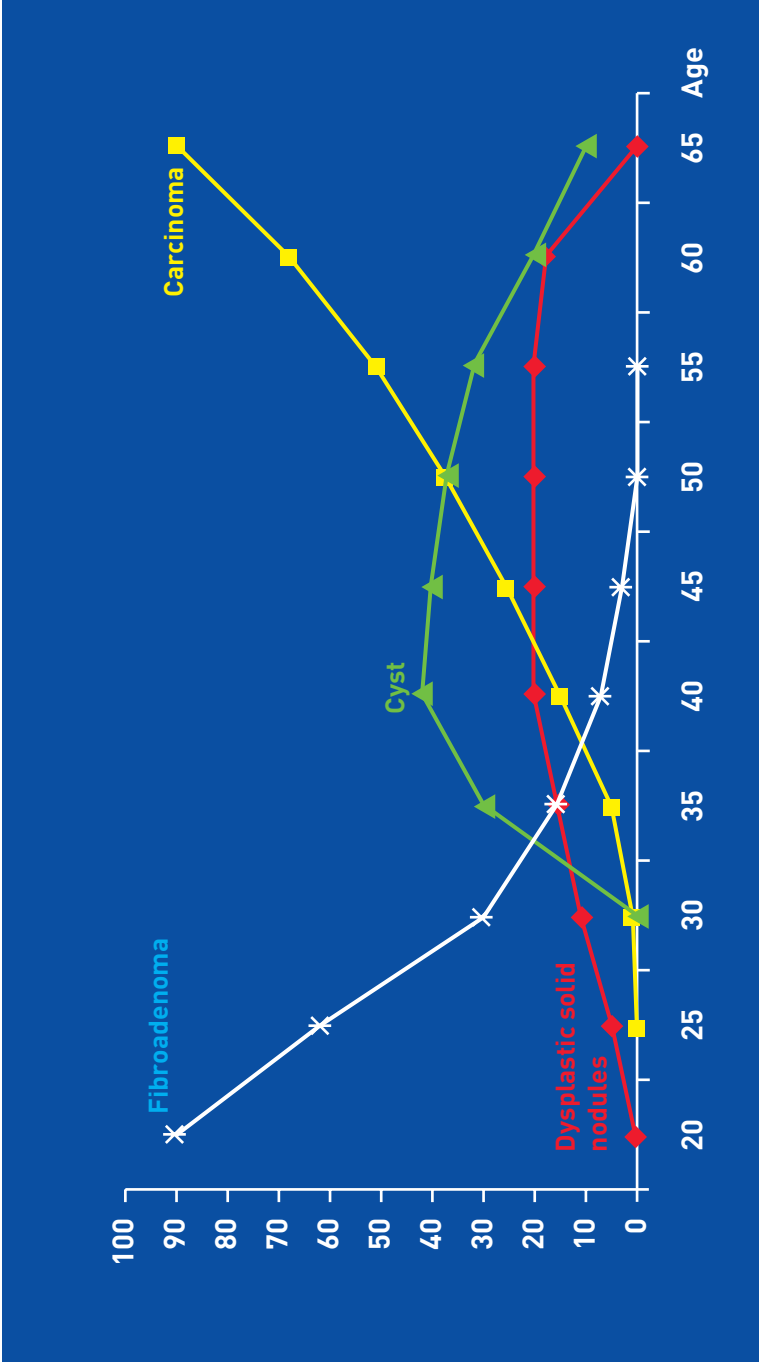


Table 1 (incidence): new cases of carcinoma of breast every 100.000 women, according to age.

What are the signs to suspect breast cancer?

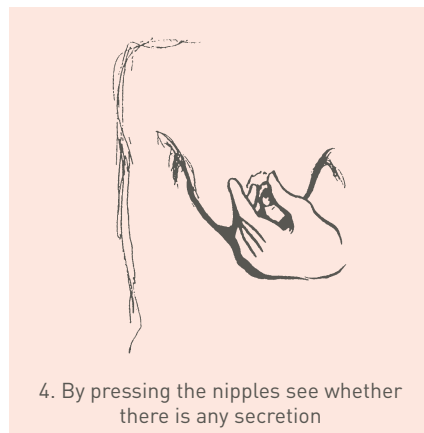
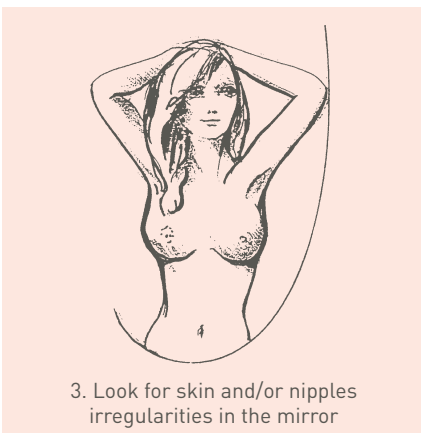
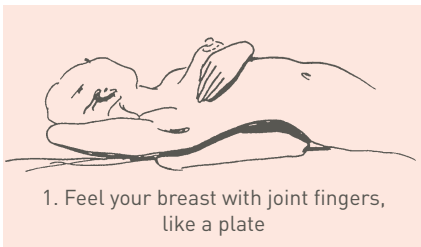
- *The first sign of breast cancer appears as a nodule hard at palpation.*
- *Every nodule that appears after the age of 30 must be considered worthy of diagnostic study.*
- *At first it is the radiologist that detects cancer that is not palpable, during a mammography or an echography, when this is done as a preventive check. Cases diagnosed in advance recover in more than 90% of cases.*
- *However even the smallest sign should be considered:*
 - *skin retraction*
 - *localized or diffused reddening*
 - *nipple retraction or alteration*
 - *bruised or transparent (such as water) plentiful secretion from nipple*
 - *increasing sizes of a underarm lymph node*
- *Generally the first symptoms of breast cancer are not painful.*
- *If you notice any change in the regular aspect/feeling of your breast:*
 - *do not ignore it*
 - *seek advice by seeing your own doctor or a specialist and have a breast check*

Which tests are more appropriate to discover breast cancer?

It is extremely important to diagnose breast cancer as soon as the first signs appear. This is because the earlier the treatment the better chance of recovery.

The most important tests to diagnose breast cancer are:

1. **Self-palpation:** the woman should feel her breasts and pay attention on any nodules that appear in the area. It is easy to do and it should be done periodically, even by young girls. It is important that woman knows that her aim is not the diagnosis, but the intuition of any changes only.



2. **Breast check:** *it is a test, conducted by a doctor. This allows to find out suspect nodules. Every woman after the age of 30 should do this test every year.*
3. **Mammography:** *every woman after the age of 40 should do a mammography every year. If there have been any case of breast cancer in the family, it is suggested doing the first mammography at the age of 35-40. The quantity of radiations in this treatment is not dangerous. When the breast is too compact and dense mammography is not effective and it should be replaced/supported by echography. The National Health System offers to every woman at the age between 50 and 69 (the more critical period) the mammography every two years.*
4. **Echography:** *it is one of the most used instrumental tests to diagnose mammary lesions, even those earlier, not palpable . This is recommended for young girls and for women who have never breast-fed, who have compact breasts. It is suitable:*
 - yearly, for women before menopause (from 30 years of age)
 - for supporting mammography every time this is not satisfactory.*Echography can not be the only test for earlier diagnosis of breast cancer.*

When clinical and radiological examinations highlight irregularities it is necessary to do in-depth check-up.

*The **FNAB (Fine Needle Aspiration Biopsy)** is a treatment, minimally invasive for the woman, able to remove cells from a suspected nodule. It can be done by hand if the nodule is palpable or with an echography or a mammography if this can be seen only by instrumental examinations.*

The **mammotome** breast biopsy is a minimally invasive biopsy that consists of taking tissue samples, micro calcifications, with only an insertion of a disposable sterilized probe.

The main aim is to campaign for breast screening in every region. The Italian Association against Cancer (Lega Italiana per la Lotta contro i Tumori) offers thorough support to enable widespread awareness amongst the women's population.

How can we treat breast cancer?

1. **Surgery:** it is the most effective therapy for the treatment of breast cancer. There are two kinds of treatments: breast-conserving surgery and mastectomy.
 - **Breast-conserving surgery** consists of removing the affected area of the breast. This is possible only when cancer is of small dimensions.
 - **Mastectomy:** this is not the most used treatment and it involves removing the entire breast. In those cases breast reconstruction is often carried out.

The two surgical procedures require the removal of **axillary lymph nodes**. The technique of “**sentinel lymph node**”, that can do an histological analysis of a lymph node, is able to establish if axillary lymph nodes are involved. Thanks to this technique it is possible to

avoid the axillary lymph node dissection and to reduce the risk of lymphedema for operated arm.

2. **Radiotherapy:** this is suitable with breast-conserving surgery to reduce the risk that some tumoral cells in the tissues can cause a relapse (This is possible in 5% of cases). With modern equipment side effects are reduced.
3. **The aim of Medical Therapies** is to attack cancer wherever this is in someone's body to recover manifest or not visible metastases.

Systemic therapy is divided in: **chemotherapy, hormone therapy, immunotherapy.**

- **Chemotherapy:** this is a treatment that uses drugs to attack cancer cells, by using toxic selective activities. The higher the cellular proliferation is the more effective this becomes. This is why, unfortunately, they can also damage healthy tissues actively growing and dividing into new cells (such as bone marrow, intestinal cells, hair bulb, etc.).
- **Hormone therapy:** it uses medicines able to block the stimulation of tumoral cells in the organism, especially for cancer that contains hormone receptors.
- **Immunotherapy:** it uses the so-called "monoclonal antibodies" which attack cancer cells with specific biomolecular characteristics.

This concerns a cancer that already exists...

Is it possible to prevent breast cancer?

Main risks.

The most important risk is linked to age (See graphic page 7) in fact it is more likely to fall ill with the course of the years.

The likelihood to fall ill cancer also increases with the following:

- breast and ovary cancer within family
 - no pregnancy (or first pregnancy after the age of 35)
 - obesity (after menopause). Physical exercises can reduce the percentage of having breast cancer. About role of diet, it is not clear yet. However it is recommended a healthy diet, full of fresh fruit and vegetables.
 - alcohol consumption
1. Benign alterations of breast (in particularly cysts and fibroadenomas), that can be found out by instrumental analysis, do not increase the risk of breast cancer.
 2. Recent studies, conducted all over the world in the last few years, have shown the role of **hormone replacement therapy (HRT)**. This is a particular hormone drug, used by several women after menopause; it lightens symptoms and it reduces complications: **these hormones, especially combined estrogen-progestogen therapy. That's because the recourse to hormone therapy should be justified and controlled.**

Prevention

When we talk about prevention for illnesses like carcinoma of breast we have to distinguish between two specific but related strategies:

- **Primary prevention:** *this regards all those elements that prevent and reduce the risk of breast cancer. Unfortunately this is still difficult to do.*
- **Secondary prevention:** *this is early diagnosis. It discovers cancer in its initial phase (by mammography or echography). This allows less aggressive treatments and more possibilities of recovery.*

*Another technique to prevent cancer is **drug prevention**: this tries to **prevent** cancer by the administration of substances containing natural or synthetic elements able to reduce the risk of development of the illness.*

It has started in 90s and its first results seem to confirm that:

- *drug prevention reduce effectively breast cancer.*
- *it is possible to remove or reduce to a minimum the side effects of the drug.*

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*La Lega Italiana per la Lotta contro i Tumori è presente in tutte le province.
Gli indirizzi sono disponibili sugli elenchi telefonici o sul sito internet www.lilt.it*