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MEDICAL AND ACADEMIC NEWSLETTER



Women's Health:
What Changes Should Women Look Out For?
See page.....03

Special Report:
2026 China-West Africa Medical & Health Industry Expo: A Post-Event Overview..... 05

Healthy Living :
Why nutrition and lifestyle care matter
See page..... 27











Contents

Special Report	-	3 & 4
Disease in Focus	-	5 & 6
Special Feature	-	7 & 8
Women's Health	-	9 & 10
Health And Technology	-	11 & 12
Healthy Living	-	13 & 14
Feature Interview	-	15 & 16
Africa In Focus	-	19
Healthy Recipe Hack	-	20
Health News	-	21
Health Terms	-	22

HCOWAA: Advancing Healthcare Standards in West Africa

The Health Community of West Africa Association (HCOWAA), based in Ghana, is a non-governmental organization dedicated to advancing healthcare across West Africa. Addressing the uneven distribution of medical resources, HCOWAA advocates for regional cooperation through a Health Alliance that unites healthcare stakeholders to create a cohesive health community.

With a mission to improve health outcomes in West Africa, HCOWAA facilitates collaboration, innovation, and research among professionals, leveraging collective resources to enhance healthcare services, policies, and access. HCOWA envisions a resilient West African healthcare system where institutions and professionals lead groundbreaking research, foster innovation, and influence policies that elevate regional healthcare.

Through initiatives like establishing a regional healthcare database, launching research projects, and hosting policy roundtables, HCOWA builds strong networks to drwive healthcare advancements. Advocacy efforts focus on equitable access, supporting vulnerable populations, and addressing healthcare disparities. The organization's objectives include fostering research and innovation, supporting health policy reforms, and integrating medical equipment manufacturers with healthcare facilities.

HCOWA also facilitates training programs, academic exchanges, and research grants, ensuring members are equipped with knowledge and skills to address regional health challenges effectively. Networking events like the HCOWA Medical and Health Industry Investment Summit & Expo connect professionals, offering a platform for partnership and knowledge sharing.

HCOWAA's commitment extends to partnerships with international health organizations and academic institutions, which amplify its impact by introducing global best practices and strengthening West African healthcare infrastructure. Collaborative efforts with international partners promote training, research, and infrastructure upgrades for health facilities, pharmaceutical establishments, and clinics.

In addition, HCOWAA's magazine partnerships, including an MoU with Health Pulse Magazine, provide platforms to publish relevant content, share insights, and enhance visibility for ongoing initiatives. Through these combined efforts, HCOWAA aims to foster a collaborative healthcare environment that not only addresses urgent health challenges but also builds a sustainable, inclusive healthcare future for West Africa.

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Special Report

2026 China–West Africa Medical & Health Industry Expo: A Post-Event Overview

The 2026 China–West Africa Medical and Health Industry and AI Diagnosis and Project Cooperation Summit and Expo has emerged as a significant platform for advancing healthcare investment, innovation, technology transfer and regional cooperation once again.

This year, the event was held from 19 to 21 August 2026 at the Ghana International Mall in Spintex, Accra, the event brought together government officials, healthcare professionals, medical experts, investors, pharmaceutical manufacturers, technology companies, hospitals, distributors and business leaders from China, Ghana and across West Africa.

Our key state partners for this year included Ministry of Health in Ghana, Ghana Health Service and Ghana Investment Promotion Authority (GIPA), under the theme, **"Deepening AI Deployment: Empowering Health in West Africa and Reshaping the Development Landscape."**

Special Guests

Among the distinguished personalities who attended the Summit were the Deputy Minister of Health, Hon. Prof. Grace Ayensu-Danquah; Chairman of the Ghana Association of Chinese Societies; Mr Tang Hong, Deputy Director-General, Ghana Health Service, Dr. Caroline Reindorf Amissah; Chief Executive Officer of the Ghana Investment Promotion Centre, Mr. Simon Madjie; Deputy Chief Executive Officer of the Ghana Free Zones Authority, Mr. Lateef Apau Wiredu; Director of the Medical Devices, Cosmetics and Household Chemicals Directorate of the Food and Drugs Authority, Dr. Mrs. Olivia Agyekumwaa Boateng; Project Lead at the 24-Hour Economy Secretariat, Linda Abbah-Foli, Director of Technical Coordination at the Ministry of Health Dr. Hafez Adam Taher, ; and Director of Nursing at the Ministry of Health, Dr. Evelyn Amoako, reps from the various African embassies among other senior government officials, healthcare professionals and industry leaders in Ghana and West African Sub Region.

Business Beyond Borders: Connecting Healthcare Markets, Businesses & Partnerships. The event also generated substantial commercial interest. More than 300 enterprises and over 100 merchants and buyers participated, creating opportunities for manufacturers, suppliers, hospitals, distributors, investors and procurement stakeholders to establish direct connections. With a projected order volume of approximately **US$80 million**, the Expo demonstrated the growing potential of West Africa's healthcare market and the importance of stronger China–West Africa trade and investment partnerships. Beyond business, the Expo delivered a wider public impact through knowledge exchange and professional engagement.

Medical Forums Driving Knowledge Exchange, Innovation & Healthcare Cooperation.

Specialised medical forums addressed surgery, gynaecology, nephrology, oncology, traditional medicine, AI diagnosis, digital health, blood purification and renal technology. These discussions created opportunities for medical professionals to share expertise, explore new technologies and identify areas for clinical cooperation.









Strategic Pre-Expo Engagements & Market Visits in Healthcare. Ahead of the Expo, Chinese delegates visited **Okaishie Drug Lane, Korle Bu Teaching Hospital** and **leading healthcare companies and governmental agencies,** such as **PMAG, AGI, GHS, FDA, GIPC, Ghana Free Zones Authority** and **professional bodies.** They also participated in the **China–West Africa Medical Merchants Conference and Matchmaking Sessions** and paid a courtesy visit to the **Chinese Embassy**. These engagements provided market insights, strengthened institutional cooperation and identified opportunities for trade, investment, technology transfer and partnerships aligned with West Africa's evolving healthcare needs.

The Expo's impact was further strengthened by strategic engagements with Ghanaian health and academic institutions, including the University of Ghana College of Health Sciences, University of Ghana Medical Centre, Greater Accra Regional Hospital and LEKMA Hospital. These engagements focused on medical education, research, professional training, knowledge exchange and technology transfer, helping to establish a foundation for cooperation beyond the event itself.

Public visibility was another major achievement. Leading Ghanaian media organisations, including TV3, Channel One TV, UTV, Angel TV, Daily Graphic, Daily Guide and Joy News, provided extensive coverage. This helped bring the Expo's conversations on healthcare innovation, investment, AI diagnosis and regional cooperation to a wider audience.
CONCLUSION

The 2026 China–West Africa Medical & Health Industry Expo demonstrated the power of partnership, innovation and knowledge exchange in advancing healthcare across the region. From strategic pre-Expo engagements and specialised medical forums to business matchmaking, exhibitions and institutional cooperation, the programme created meaningful opportunities for lasting impact. Building on these achievements, the 2027 edition is poised to expand participation, deepen partnerships and translate emerging opportunities into stronger healthcare solutions, investments and regional collaboration.





Disease In Focus

The Pink Burden:

Why Early Detection is Our Best Defense

Breast cancer remains a critical health challenge facing women worldwide. Globally, an estimated 2.4million women were diagnosed with breast cancer in 2024, leading to 694,000 deaths with 5-year survival for women in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) sitting at just 41% compared to 87% in high-income countries (WHO 2024).

In Ghana, breast cancer is both the most frequently diagnosed malignancy and the leading cause of cancer mortality among women. With over 4,000 new cases diagnosed annually, more than 50% of affected Ghanaian women succumb to the disease, at a rate far higher than global averages and strikingly elevated compared to high-income nations.

The high mortality and burden of breast cancer in Ghana are driven by several factors:



Dr. Jonathan Akuaku
Medical Officer & Public Health Advocate – Essence Clinic Medical Laboratory

1. Younger Age at Presentation: Unlike high-income nations where breast cancer predominantly affects postmenopausal women over 50, the median age of diagnosis in Ghana is between 40 and 49 years. A significant proportion of Ghanaian patients present with aggressive biological subtypes, including triple-negative breast cancer.

2. Late-Stage Presentation: Over 60% to 70% of Ghanaian women present at advanced stages (Stage III or IV). Late presentation is fueled by low public awareness, fear of mastectomy (removal of part or all of the breast tissue), sociocultural stigma and reliance on alternative primary interventions before seeking hospital care.

3. Structural and Economic Barriers: Out-of-pocket costs for diagnostic workups (biopsies, immunohistochemistry and advanced imaging) cause delays in seeking care.

Risk Factors and Prevention
While up to 80% of breast cancers occur in women with no modifiable risk factors beyond female sex and increasing age, addressing modifiable lifestyle risks remains an essential first line of defense.
• Modifiable Risk Factors are those related to lifestyle choices that can significantly affect the disease outcome. They include obesity, physical inactivity, harmful alcohol consumption, tobacco use and prolonged postmenopausal hormone replacement therapy.

• Non-Modifiable Risk Factors are those risk factors that cannot be altered: Family history of breast or ovarian cancer, early menarche, late menopause and inherited genetic mutations (such as BRCA1/2).

Primary Prevention:
Adopting a healthy lifestyle, maintaining an optimal body mass index (BMI), engaging in regular physical exercise, reducing alcohol intake, avoiding tobacco and promoting exclusive breastfeeding can help lower overall risk.

Early Detection:
Knowing the Signs and Screening
Early detection saves lives. When breast cancer is caught at Stage I or II, treatability and long-term survival rise dramatically.

• Breast Self-Awareness: Women should become familiar with the normal feel and appearance of their breasts. Key warning signs include a painless lump or thickening, painless skin dimpling or puckering, nipple inversion, or abnormal/bloody nipple discharge. Any persistent change warrants immediate clinical evaluation at a health facility.

•Clinical Screening: Clinical Breast Examinations (CBE) performed annually by qualified healthcare providers are essential for early detection in resource-conscious settings. For women aged 40 and above, screening mammography remains the gold standard for detecting non-palpable lesions where equipment is available.

Navigating Systemic Provisions: NHIS and Pink October Support

A common misconception in Ghana is that cancer care is entirely unfunded. Under the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), essential aspects of breast cancer care are covered, including:

• Clinical Examinations & Basic Diagnostics: Consultations and basic diagnostic procedures at accredited public and primary care facilities.

• Surgical and Systemic Therapies: Mastectomies, lumpectomies and specific core generic chemotherapy drugs are listed on the NHIS Medicines List.

During Pink October, public health facilities, municipal health directorates, and private entities collaborate to offer free Clinical Breast Examinations, heavily discounted mammograms, and educational outreach across Ghana.

Every journey matters, and no woman should face breast cancer alone. By combining personal vigilance, early screening, and prompt medical intervention, we can close the survival gap and save lives across Ghana.



Special feature

Understanding The Breast Cancer Patient

By Honest Adzande (Public Health Nurse)



1. As a nurse, what is one of the first things you notice when caring for a breast cancer patient?
One of the first things I notice is the patient's emotional state. Many patients are frightened, worried about their future and sometimes afraid of what the diagnosis means for their family. As nurses, we have to look beyond the illness and understand the person behind the diagnosis.

2. How does a breast cancer diagnosis affect a patient emotionally?
A breast cancer diagnosis can bring fear, anxiety, sadness and uncertainty. Some patients may struggle with changes in their body, especially after surgery or during treatment. Others may worry about losing their lives or leaving their families behind. Emotional support is therefore an important part of their care.

3. From your experience, what do breast cancer patients fear the most?
Many patients fear death, but I have also seen patients worry about the effect of treatment on their appearance, their families, their relationships and their ability to continue working. Some are also afraid of chemotherapy because of what they have heard about its side effects.

4. How can nurses help patients cope with these fears?
We listen to them without judging them. Sometimes a patient simply needs someone who will listen and reassure her. We explain their treatment in simple terms, encourage them to ask questions and remind them that they are not alone. We also encourage them to rely on supportive family members and healthcare professionals.

5. What is the biggest misconception you have encountered about breast cancer?
One misconception is that breast cancer automatically means death. Breast cancer can be serious, but early detection and appropriate treatment can make a significant difference. This is why women should not ignore unusual changes in their breasts or delay seeking medical attention.

6. How important is early detection?
Early detection is extremely important. When breast cancer is identified early, healthcare professionals have more opportunities to provide effective treatment. Women should become familiar with their breasts and seek medical attention if they notice a lump, unusual swelling, changes in the skin, changes in the nipple or other unusual symptoms.

7. How do patients respond to changes in their appearance during treatment?
It can be very difficult for some patients. Hair loss, weight changes, scars or breast surgery can affect how a patient sees herself. Some patients become withdrawn or lose confidence. As nurses, we provide emotional support and remind them that their value is not determined by their physical appearance.

8. What role does the family play in the recovery of a breast cancer patient?
Family support can make a great difference. Patients often need someone to accompany them to appointments, help them at home, encourage them emotionally and simply be present when they are having a difficult day. However, family members should also allow the patient to express her feelings rather than always telling her to "be strong."

9. What would you say to a woman who has just been diagnosed with breast cancer?
I would tell her not to lose hope. Take the diagnosis one step at a time and ask questions about your treatment. Allow yourself to feel your emotions, but do not isolate yourself. Work closely with your healthcare team and seek support from people you trust.

10. What would you like people to understand about breast cancer patients?
I want people to understand that breast cancer patients need more than medicine. They need compassion, patience, encouragement and understanding. Sometimes a simple phone call, a visit or helping with everyday activities can mean a lot to someone going through treatment.

11. What can women do to protect their breast health?
Women should pay attention to changes in their breasts and seek professional medical advice when something unusual is noticed. They should also discuss appropriate breast cancer screening with a qualified healthcare professional, particularly when they have risk factors.

12. What is your final message to breast cancer patients and their families?
Breast cancer can be a challenging journey, but patients should know that they do not have to go through it alone. Seek medical care early, follow your healthcare team's advice and surround yourself with people who support you. To families, be patient, listen and offer practical and emotional support. Sometimes, simply being there can make a very difficult journey a little easier.



Women's Health

Breast Self-Awareness:

What Changes Should Women Look Out For?

Knowing your breasts can help you recognise unusual changes and seek medical advice. Although most breast changes are not cancerous, awareness is important for protecting your health.
Breasts naturally change with menstruation, pregnancy, breastfeeding, weight fluctuations, menopause and ageing. Breast self-awareness means knowing what is normal for you and seeking assessment when something changes.

What Is Breast Self-Awareness?
Breast self-awareness means knowing the usual appearance and feel of your breasts. Unlike a formal monthly self-examination, it requires no rigid technique or specific day.
Ask yourself: Does anything look or feel different from what is normal for me? Breasts are naturally asymmetrical.



Changes Women Should Look Out For

A new lump or thickening
A new breast lump can be a symptom of cancer, but not every lump is cancerous. Benign conditions, including cysts and fibroadenomas, are common. A new, persistent, firm, irregular or growing lump should be assessed by a healthcare professional. Touch alone cannot determine whether it is cancer. Do not ignore a painless lump, because many breast cancers do not hurt.

Changes in breast size or shape
Notice unexplained changes in either breast, including swelling, an indentation or an area pulled inward. Persistent changes require assessment.

Skin changes
Look for dimpling, puckering, redness, thickening, persistent scaling or sores that do not heal. Skin resembling an orange peel, known as peau d'orange, is another warning sign. Breast cancer does not always produce a lump. Rapid swelling, redness or thickening should be assessed promptly.

Nipple changes and unusual discharge
A newly inverted nipple, a change in direction, persistent crusting, scaling, sores or distortion should not be overlooked. Persistent eczema-like changes may sometimes indicate Paget disease of the breast and require medical evaluation.

Discharge can occur with pregnancy, breastfeeding, hormonal changes, medications or benign conditions. Seek advice if it is unexplained, spontaneous, affects one breast, appears bloody or clear, or accompanies a lump.
Swelling around the armpit or collarbone
A new lump or persistent swelling in the armpit or above the collarbone may indicate enlarged lymph nodes. Infection can also cause swelling, but assessment is important when the cause is unclear.

Dr. Judith Ragira
Obstetrics & Gynecologist-
Essence Clinic Medical Laboratory

Persistent breast pain
Breast pain may be linked to menstruation, pregnancy, breastfeeding or benign conditions. Pain alone is not usually a sign of cancer. Persistent or unexplained pain, especially with a lump, skin change or nipple abnormality, should be evaluated.
When Should You See a Doctor?

Seek medical advice whenever you notice a new, unusual or persistent breast change. Do not wait for a lump to become painful or grow. Assessment usually begins with a medical history and breast examination. A clinician may recommend ultrasound, mammography or, in selected circumstances, breast MRI. A biopsy may be needed to investigate an abnormality.

Finding a lump does not automatically mean cancer, and no lump does not completely exclude it.
Breast Awareness and Screening

Breast awareness is not a substitute for screening. Awareness helps women recognise changes, while screening aims to detect cancer before symptoms develop. Depending on age, risk factors, family history and local guidelines, screening may include mammography. Women with a strong family history or certain genetic mutations may need an individualised plan.

Conclusion
Breast health should be approached with knowledge rather than fear. Most breast lumps are benign, but unusual changes should never be dismissed. Fear may delay care and allow a serious condition to progress.

Every woman's breasts change with age and hormones. Understanding your normal breast appearance and texture helps you recognise changes that may require medical attention.



Health and Technology

The Role of Mammography, Ultrasound, Biopsy and Artificial Intelligence in Breast Cancer Detection



By Dr (Med) George Henry Acquah
Specialist Public Health Physician - Korle bu Teaching Hospital

Breast cancer remains a major health concern worldwide, affecting millions of women and their families. Early detection plays a vital role in improving treatment outcomes and reducing deaths associated with the disease. Today, advances in medical technology are transforming how doctors identify, examine and diagnose breast cancer. Mammography, ultrasound, biopsy techniques and Artificial Intelligence (AI) are among the most important tools helping healthcare professionals detect suspicious changes in breast tissue and make more informed medical decisions. These technologies are creating new opportunities for earlier diagnosis and timely treatment.

Mammography is one of the most widely used technologies for breast cancer screening. It uses low-dose X-rays to produce detailed images of breast tissue, allowing doctors to identify abnormalities that may not be noticeable during a physical examination. These abnormalities may include small lumps, unusual tissue changes and tiny calcium deposits known as microcalcifications, which can sometimes indicate early breast cancer. Digital mammography allows images to be viewed and analysed electronically, while three-dimensional mammography, also called digital breast tomosynthesis, produces images from different angles. This can help doctors examine breast tissue more clearly and identify suspicious areas, although additional testing may still be necessary.





Ultrasound is another valuable technology used in breast cancer detection. Unlike mammography, which uses X-rays, ultrasound uses high-frequency sound waves to create images of internal breast structures. It is particularly useful for examining suspicious lumps and determining whether they are fluid-filled cysts or solid masses. Ultrasound can also help doctors investigate abnormalities in women with dense breast tissue, where mammography may be more difficult to interpret. In addition, it can guide doctors when performing biopsies, helping them collect tissue samples from the correct location. Although ultrasound is useful, it does not replace mammography for routine screening in most women.

While mammography and ultrasound can identify suspicious abnormalities, a biopsy is often required to confirm whether breast cancer is present. During this procedure, a healthcare professional removes a small sample of tissue from the affected area for laboratory examination. Modern image-guided biopsy techniques use mammography or ultrasound to locate the precise area that needs to be sampled. Specialists then examine the tissue under a microscope to determine whether cancer cells are present. If cancer is confirmed, further laboratory tests can help establish the type of cancer and identify characteristics that influence treatment decisions. Accurate diagnosis is essential because it helps doctors recommend the most appropriate care for each patient.

Artificial Intelligence is also becoming an important part of modern breast cancer detection. AI-powered systems can analyse mammograms, identify unusual patterns and highlight areas that may require closer examination by radiologists. These tools can help healthcare professionals review images more efficiently, prioritise suspicious cases and reduce the likelihood of overlooking certain abnormalities. Some systems can also support the assessment of a patient's risk of developing breast cancer. However, AI is not a replacement for qualified medical professionals. Its findings must be interpreted alongside clinical information and expert judgement, and its reliability depends on proper testing, high-quality data and appropriate use in different populations.

Despite these technological advances, access to breast cancer detection remains a challenge in many developing countries, including Ghana and other parts of Africa. The high cost of imaging equipment, limited numbers of trained specialists, inadequate diagnostic facilities and financial barriers can prevent women from receiving timely screening. Fear, misinformation and limited awareness may also discourage women from seeking medical attention when they notice changes in their breasts.

Improving breast cancer detection in Africa requires investment in affordable diagnostic equipment, professional training, public education and accessible screening services. Governments, hospitals and international partners can work together to strengthen healthcare systems and introduce reliable technologies that meet local needs. Community education should also encourage women to seek medical assessment for unusual breast changes and participate in recommended screening programmes.

Ultimately, combining mammography, ultrasound, biopsy and carefully validated AI systems can strengthen breast cancer detection and support earlier diagnosis. Technology alone, however, is not enough. Every woman must have access to qualified healthcare professionals, accurate testing and timely treatment, regardless of her financial circumstances or geographical location. By making these innovations more accessible, healthcare systems can improve breast cancer care and give more women the opportunity to receive appropriate treatment at the right time.

Nutrition, Physical Activity & Lifestyle During and After Breast Cancer Treatment

An evidence-informed guide to nutrition, movement and healthy living

Why nutrition and lifestyle care matter
A breast cancer diagnosis can change a person's relationship with food, movement and everyday life. Treatment may affect appetite, taste, digestion, energy levels and body weight, while the emotional impact of diagnosis can also influence eating and daily routines. Nutrition care should therefore be considered an important part of supportive cancer care alongside medical treatment

1. Nutrition During Treatment
During treatment, the priority is to maintain adequate nutritional intake and preserve strength. There is currently insufficient evidence to recommend restrictive diets, fasting or specific "cancer-fighting" diets as a routine part of cancer treatment. Instead, nutritional care should be individualized according to the person's treatment, symptoms, nutritional status and existing health conditions
Protein-rich foods such as eggs, poultry, fish where appropriate, dairy or fortified alternatives, soy foods and legumes can contribute to meeting protein requirements, alongside vegetables, fruits, whole grains and healthy fats. When nausea, taste changes, fatigue or other treatment effects interfere with eating, dietetic counselling can help patients manage symptoms and maintain adequate intake

2. Eating for Recovery After Treatment
After treatment, the focus can gradually shift towards recovery, long-term health and sustainable lifestyle habits. Rather than concentrating on a particular "superfood," survivors are encouraged to follow an overall healthy dietary pattern rich in plant foods and other nutrient-dense choices For people living with and beyond breast cancer, WCRF suggests considering an increase in dietary fiber, although the organization notes that current evidence cannot establish that increasing fiber itself directly improves breast cancer outcomes. Fiber-rich foods include vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts and seeds

3. Physical Activity: Start Where You Are
Physical activity is another important component of recovery. Exercise during cancer treatment can help maintain physical function, improve fitness and reduce some treatment-related symptoms, including fatigue. For breast cancer survivors specifically, greater physical activity is associated with better health outcomes, although it remains uncertain whether increasing activity directly causes improvements in survival

Activity should therefore be introduced progressively and adapted to the individual's tre atment history, symptoms and functional capacity. Walking, cycling, swimming, stretching and resistance training can all be considered as part of an appropriate program



4. Body Weight: A Careful Approach
Body weight should also be approached with care. During active treatment, intentional weight loss may not be appropriate for everyone, particularly when nutritional intake is inadequate or there is a risk of malnutrition.
After breast cancer treatment, WCRF recommends that people who are not underweight consider avoiding weight gain during and after treatment, while acknowledging that evidence is insufficient to recommend intentional weight loss specifically to improve breast cancer outcomes.

5. Beyond Food and Exercise
Lifestyle care extends beyond nutrition and exercise. Limiting alcohol, avoiding tobacco and maintaining regular physical activity are part of broader cancer-survivorship recommendations. Supplements should also be approached cautiously; current evidence does not support routinely using supplements to improve survival, and individual circumstances should be discussed with an appropriately trained healthcare professional. Sleep, emotional wellbeing, social support and regular follow-up also deserve attention as part of holistic survivorship care.

6. A Sustainable Approach to Survivorship
Ultimately, breast cancer survivorship is not about following a perfect diet or exercising intensely. It is about making realistic, evidence-informed choices that fit an individual's treatment, culture, resources, preferences and stage of recovery.
Dietitians and the wider oncology team can help translate scientific evidence into practical strategies that evolve as a person's needs change. With appropriate support, nutrition, physical activity and healthy lifestyle practices can become valuable tools for recovery, resilience and living well during and beyond breast cancer treatment.

KEY TAKEAWAY
There is no single "perfect" breast cancer diet. The goal is individualized, sustainable care that supports nutritional adequacy, physical function, recovery and overall wellbeing.



By Tracy Adwoa Boakye, Registered Dietician(RD)



Feature Interview

HOW MODERN CANCER TREATMENT IS CHANGING BREAST CANCER CARE



MESHACH KWEKU GALLEY
DIAGNOSTIC RADIOGRAPHER

Breast cancer remains one of the most common cancers affecting women worldwide. According to the World Health Organization, approximately 2.3 million women were diagnosed in 2022. However, advances in medical imaging, surgery, medicines and radiotherapy are transforming detection and treatment, improving survival prospects and helping patients maintain a better quality of life.

Today, breast cancer care is becoming more precise and personalised. Treatment decisions increasingly depend on the cancer's type, stage and biological characteristics, as well as the patient's individual needs. The aim is not only to control the disease but also to reduce side effects and preserve healthy tissues.

Improvements in breast imaging are helping healthcare professionals identify suspicious changes more effectively. Digital breast tomosynthesis, also called three-dimensional mammography, captures images from different angles, helping specialists examine overlapping breast tissue. Contrast-enhanced mammography uses an iodine-based contrast agent to highlight areas with increased blood supply, while magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) helps assess selected patients, particularly those at high risk. Abbreviated breast MRI offers useful diagnostic information through a shorter imaging protocol.

Artificial intelligence is also influencing breast cancer detection. Computer-assisted tools can help professionals identify suspicious areas, compare images and prioritise examinations. However, these technologies support rather than replace clinical judgement, and their availability varies between healthcare facilities.

Treatment options have also improved considerably. Breast-conserving surgery allows suitable patients to retain more breast tissue. Hormonal medicines help control hormone-sensitive cancers, while targeted therapies, including HER2-directed medicines, address specific tumour characteristics. Immunotherapy benefits selected patients, including some with triple-negative breast cancer. Consequently, treatment can differ significantly between patients with seemingly similar diagnoses.

Radiotherapy has become more precise through improved treatment planning and image-guided techniques. Deep inspiration breath hold can reduce radiation exposure to the heart during treatment for suitable patients with left-sided breast cancer. Meanwhile, shorter-course radiotherapy schedules allow many patients to complete treatment in fewer sessions, reducing hospital visits, transport expenses and time away from work or family.

Despite these advances, access remains unequal, particularly across Africa. Late diagnosis, expensive investigations, shortages of specialised services and delays in referrals continue to affect outcomes. Financial difficulties and long journeys can prevent patients from receiving timely treatment.

In Ghana, breast cancer remains a significant health concern. Some women delay seeking medical attention because of fear, misinformation or financial constraints. A breast lump, changes in breast shape, unusual nipple discharge or skin changes should be assessed by a qualified healthcare professional. Although not every breast change indicates cancer, prompt evaluation is important.

Ghana has specialised facilities offering surgery, radiotherapy and medical cancer treatments, but access remains challenging for some patients, especially those travelling from rural communities. Strengthening diagnostic services, training healthcare professionals, maintaining equipment and reducing financial barriers are therefore essential.

The future of breast cancer care depends on combining technological progress with early diagnosis, skilled professionals and compassionate support. Advanced imaging, laboratory testing, targeted medicines and precision radiotherapy can improve outcomes when patients receive appropriate treatment promptly.

For Ghana and the wider African continent, the priority is to make these advances accessible and affordable. Public awareness, reliable cancer services and stronger collaboration among healthcare professionals can help narrow existing gaps.

Ultimately, modern cancer treatment is making breast cancer care more personalised and effective. Its success, however, must be measured by how many women receive timely treatment, experience fewer complications and live healthier lives, regardless of their location or financial circumstances.



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Africa in Focus

NIGERIA'S GROWING BREAST CANCER CRISIS

Breast cancer is becoming an increasingly important health concern in Nigeria, affecting thousands of women and placing pressure on families and the healthcare system. The disease is now the leading cause of cancer deaths among Nigerian women, according to the International Agency for Research on Cancer. Current estimates show that about 29,700 new breast cancer cases occurred among Nigerian women in 2024, with approximately 16,200 deaths recorded from the disease.

Behind these numbers are women whose lives can change dramatically after a diagnosis. Breast cancer develops when abnormal cells in breast tissue grow uncontrollably and can eventually spread to other parts of the body. When detected early, treatment can be more effective, but delayed diagnosis can allow the disease to become more difficult to treat. The World Health Organization identifies early detection and timely diagnosis as important parts of improving breast cancer outcomes.

One of the major challenges in Nigeria is ensuring that women have access to appropriate screening, diagnosis and treatment. A woman who notices a new lump, thickening, changes in breast shape or size, skin changes, nipple changes or unusual discharge should seek medical evaluation. These signs do not automatically mean cancer, but they should not be ignored.

Awareness, timely medical assessment and access to appropriate care can help change breast cancer from a hidden threat into a disease that can be detected and treated earlier.

Technology is also becoming an important part of the fight. Mammography and ultrasound can help healthcare professionals investigate breast abnormalities, while biopsy can determine whether suspicious tissue is cancerous. Artificial intelligence is also being explored as a tool to support the analysis of medical images and assist healthcare professionals in detecting suspicious findings.

Nigeria is strengthening its national cancer response. The Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare has developed a new National Cancer Control Plan covering prevention, early detection, diagnosis, treatment, palliative care, survivorship and patient navigation.

The challenge extends beyond Nigeria. Across Africa, breast cancer outcomes are affected by differences in access to screening, diagnosis, treatment and specialist care. WHO Africa has highlighted the need to strengthen the ability of primary healthcare workers to recognise suspected breast cancer and ensure timely referral.

For Nigerian women, the message is simple but powerful: do not ignore changes in your breasts.

Source: International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC)



A Powerful Meal For Breast Cancer Care

Here is a simple, nutritious recipe that can be used for a breast cancer patient, with ingredients and preparation clearly separated.

Ingredients
1 medium fish fillet (tilapia or salmon)
1 medium sweet potato
1 cup spinach
½ cup carrots
½ cup broccoli
¼ avocado
1 teaspoon olive oil
1 small piece of fresh ginger
1 clove of garlic
½ lemon
A small amount of salt

How to Make It
Wash and peel the sweet potato. Cut it into pieces and boil until soft.

Season the fish with grated ginger, crushed garlic, lemon juice and a small amount of salt.

Grill or bake the fish until it is completely cooked.

Wash the spinach, carrots and broccoli. Steam them until tender.

Place the cooked sweet potato, vegetables and fish in a bowl.

Add the avocado and drizzle with a teaspoon of olive oil.

Serve warm and enjoy.
Health tip: This meal provides protein, vegetables, fibre and healthy fats, making it a nutritious option during cancer treatment. Individual dietary needs can vary, so a cancer patient should follow any food restrictions given by their healthcare team.



Health News

Breast Cancer: Ghana Urges Women to Act Early

Ghana has renewed its call for early detection and timely treatment of breast cancer as the country observes Breast Cancer Awareness Month, with health authorities warning that delays in seeking care continue to cost lives.

The Ghana Health Service and Ministry of Health launched the 2026 National Pink Month campaign under the theme "Early Action, Better Outcomes."The campaign aims to encourage women and families to recognise breast cancer warning signs, seek medical attention quickly and improve access to diagnosis and treatment.
Health authorities estimate that Ghana records about 4,650 new breast cancer cases and approximately 2,060 deaths every year. Breast cancer remains the leading cancer affecting women in the country, placing a significant emotional, social and financial burden on patients, families and the healthcare system.

The Deputy Minister of Health, Dr Grace Ayensu-Danquah, said awareness must be accompanied by accessible healthcare services. She highlighted prevention, early detection, equitable access to treatment and compassionate care as key areas in Ghana's response to breast cancer.

Health officials are also working to improve breast cancer screening and referral services. Through partnerships with healthcare organisations, health workers are being trained in clinical breast examinations, breast cancer education and patient navigation.

Technology is also being introduced to improve access to screening. A mobile mammography initiative has been developed to bring breast cancer screening closer to women, particularly those living in communities where access to mammography services may be limited. The mobile unit includes mammography and ultrasound equipment.
The Breast Society of Ghana has also urged women to seek medical attention when they notice unusual breast changes, including breast lumps or nipple discharge. The society stressed that breast cancer detected at an early stage can have much better treatment outcomes.

The World Health Organization has reported significant differences in breast cancer survival across regions. Its latest global estimates put the median five-year breast cancer survival in Africa at 39.1 percent, compared with 77.8 percent globally. The organisation says early diagnosis and timely treatment are essential to improving survival.

Health experts are therefore urging women not to ignore unusual changes in their breasts or allow fear, stigma, misinformation or financial concerns to delay care. They also emphasise that breast cancer can affect men, although it is far less common.
Ghana's health authorities are calling for breast cancer awareness to continue throughout the year, rather than being limited to October.



Health Terms

Health Terms associated with Breast Cancer

1.Mammography: An X-ray examination used to detect breast abnormalities.
2.Breast Biopsy: Removing a small sample of breast tissue for laboratory testing.
3.Breast Ultrasound: Uses sound waves to examine breast tissue and detect lump.
4.Tumour: An abnormal growth of cells that may be benign or cancerous.
5.Metastasis: The spread of cancer cells from the breast to other parts of the body.
6.Lymph Nodes: Small structures that can be checked to determine whether breast cancer has spread.
7.Estrogen Receptor (ER): A protein that can influence the growth of certain breast cancers.
8.Progesterone Receptor (PR): A protein that can help determine how a breast cancer may respond to hormone treatment.
9.HER2: A protein that is present in higher amounts in some breast cancers and can influence treatment.
10.Chemotherapy: Medicines used to destroy or control cancer cells.

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