A trained surgeon can remove tumors while still preserving the breast.

The human body is made of cells that grow, divide and die in an orderly fashion. As adults get older, their bodies’ cells grow and divide specifically to replace damaged or dying cells. Cancer starts when a normal cell becomes damaged or changed. When this damage occurs, cells do not die when they should. The cells instead begin to grow out-of-control and these extra cells form a mass of tissue called a tumor. Tumors are not all cancerous. Tumors can either be benign (non-cancerous) or malignant (cancerous). Malignant cancer cells can invade and spread to other tissues. When cancer cells enter into the body, they can metastasize to other parts of the body.

Benign: A tumor or growth that is not cancerous. Benign tumors do not spread to other parts of the body. Also, they do not change or destroy nearby tissue. In general, they grow slowly and are not harmful. Benign tumors can be dangerous however, if they grow too large and begin to invade blood vessels or nearby organs.

Malignant: A tumor that is cancerous is made of cells that grow out of control. These tumors may grow into nearby tissues and spread to other parts of the body.

Metastasis (secondary cancer): Cancer cells will sometimes move from the primary location of the first cancer diagnosis through the blood or lymph system to other parts of the body and begin to grow into another tumor or tumors. Although the cancer metastasizes to other parts of the body, metastases will keep the name of the original cancer location.

Carcinoma: Carcinoma is a cancer that begins in the skin or tissues that line or cover organs. There are several types of carcinoma, including adenocarcinoma, basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma. These types of carcinomas, as well as melanomas, can be treated by Alaska Surgical Oncology.

Adenocarcinoma: An adenocarcinoma is a type of cancer that starts in mucous secreting glands in the body. These glands are prevalent throughout the body, so cancer can begin in many places in the body. The most prevalent types of adenocarcinoma that Alaska Surgical Oncology is trained to treat are esophageal, stomach, pancreatic, and colorectal cancers.

Sarcoma: Cancer that begins in bone, cartilage, fat, muscle, blood vessels, or other connective or supportive tissue.
bloodstream or lymph system, the mutated cells can travel to other parts of the body and begin to grow. This process is called metastasis.

Diagnosing breast cancer

Breast cancer is a malignant tumor that starts in the cells of the breast. A typical woman’s breast is made up of: lobules (glands that produce breast milk) ducts (small tubes that carry milk from the lobules to the nipple) fatty and connective tissue, blood vessels, and lymph vessels.

Most breast cancers begin in the cells that line the milk ducts while some breast cancers start in the cells lining the lobules that produce the milk. Sarcomas and lymphomas start in cells of the other tissues in the breast. The lymph system is one of the main ways breast cancer spreads. Lymph nodes are small tissues that contain a certain kind of immune system cell that fight infections. Breast cancer cells can travel in lymphatic vessels and begin to grow in lymph nodes. The good news: Most breast lumps are benign and are not cancer. Benign breast tumors are abnormal growths caused by the combination of cysts (fluid-filled sacs) and fibrosis (scarlike tissue). These growths can make the breasts feel lumpy.

Breast cancer surgery

Breast cancer can be removed surgically if caught early. More good news: Advances in surgical oncology enable some women to preserve their breast during surgery if they choose the right cancer surgeon.

If you’ve learned that you may have breast cancer or a lump that needs removal, it is important to find a surgeon who specializes in the treatment of cancer and one who is trained to preserve the appearance of the breast.

In the past, a surgeon’s main goal was to remove the cancer and prolong the patient’s life. This, however, could result in a mastectomy where the entire breast is removed. For example, there are many surgeons who perform breast cancer surgery, but few are trained in the preservation of the breast. New surgical techniques can enable the trained and experienced surgical oncologist to successfully remove the cancer and still preserve the cosmetic appearance of the breast.

Alaska Surgical Oncology includes a surgical oncologist who trained at the well-known MD Anderson Cancer Center, and has performed thousands of breast cancer surgeries.

Prevention: Time is crucial!

More good news: If breast lumps are detected early — through self screening or with a painless mammogram diagnostic test that can detect hidden lumps — the odds of successfully removing the lump or tumor and living a normal healthy life increase dramatically.

According to the American Cancer Society, “Women age 40 and older should have a mammogram every year. Women in their 20s and 30s should have a breast exam as part of a periodic health exam by a health professional preferably every 3 years. Starting at age 40, women should do this annually.”

Alaska Surgical Oncology

We believe Alaskans deserve access to the best breast cancer care available. Alaska Surgical Oncology is based in Anchorage. Our cancer specialty practice includes the expertise of Charles Portera, MD, a fellowship-trained surgeon with more than 20 years of experience in the surgical removal of cancer. We take an aggressive and proactive approach to cancer, helping our patients to regain a normal life through the most advanced, minimally invasive surgical techniques.