



Our Website Saved A Life: Know Your Nipples!

The following email was received from a young woman in Ireland who read our web page on Paget's disease, and credits us with saving her life.

Hello,

A year ago I searched your website as I feared I had Paget's disease of the nipple. My surgeon would not listen to me as he said it was NOT Paget's disease!! After reading the information supplied on your website I confronted my surgeon asking him "Could you stake your career on no Paget's disease" and he agreed to do a biopsy (as this was the recommendation on your website).

I was diagnosed on the 16th of January 2010, mastectomy 16th February and am now fine. I am really looking forward to Christmas as I have two small children (6 and 5). As a 36 year old science teacher in Ireland I feel I might still have Paget's disease if I had not taken the advice on your website. My family and I thank you from the bottom of our hearts and wish you all a Happy Christmas and a Peaceful New Year.

Joanne Raftery.

What is Paget's disease of the nipple?

Paget's disease is a rare form of breast cancer that is curable when caught early. It is a form of non-invasive cancer that starts in the nipple, and it may take years before it progresses to invasive cancer. The first sign of Paget's disease are small ulceration in the skin of the nipple (see link to pictures on the web. They are typically painless and usually go unnoticed until they cover a large part of the nipple. Over time they can spread to involve the entire areola.

For anyone who has seen a few cases, the diagnosis is easily made on inspection. The diagnosis is confirmed with a punch biopsy that takes a few minutes, is painless, and is done under local anesthesia in the doctor's office.

The thing that surprises most about this condition is that the diagnosis is typically missed by even experienced physicians. In the past few years I have seen several examples in which the diagnosis was missed despite the patient telling the doctor that she suspected Paget's. In one case the delay was more than three years. The patient had consultation from two surgeons and one dermatologist who all reassured the patient that she did not have Paget's.

I think the reason for the delay is that very few physicians have seen an early case of Paget's, and their only exposure to this condition is from text book pictures that show examples of advanced disease. To make the diagnosis at a time when it is curable requires an awareness of the more subtle clinical changes associated with early Paget as seen in the examples provided in our website.

Given that physicians in general are have limited experience in this rare but curable form of cancer, it is important that women are aware of this condition. If a women notices changes in the appearance of her nipples, they should be evaluated by a knowledgeable breast physician. If you have any question or concerns about Paget's or other breast problems be sure to Contact Us. Also I encourage you all to share this message with a friend. It could save a life.