

Breast Cancer Awareness

October's Breast Cancer Awareness Month is just around the corner. For American women, breast cancer is the second most common cancer (behind skin cancers), with one in eight developing it sometime in her life. While incidence rates have increased slightly in recent years, the death rate of breast cancer in women over 50 has decreased, likely the result of increased breast cancer awareness, early detection and better treatment. What we know for certain is that getting regularly screened is the most reliable way to detect breast cancer early and treat it successfully. This includes scheduling regular screenings for a mammogram coupled with breast self-exams.

Mammograms

Mammograms are low-dose X-rays of the breast that can find changes or cancer years before physical symptoms even develop. The American Cancer Society says that women over 55 years of age are at an average risk for breast cancer (and no personal or family history of breast cancer) should get screened every other year (unless they choose to continue with their yearly mammograms). Women at high risk are those who have a genetic mutation known to increase breast cancer, or a first-degree relative who does. If you fall into this category, it is important that you consult your Care N' Care physician about screening assessments.

Breast Self-Exams

Breast self-examination can help women become familiar with how their breasts normally look and feel so that they can report any changes to their doctor right away. The National Breast Cancer Foundation recommends women perform these breast self-exam practices at home once a month:

- When in the shower – With the pads of your three middle fingers, press down the entire breast and armpit area with light, medium and firm pressure

feeling for any lump, thickening, hardened knot or any other breast changes.

- In front of a mirror – Visually inspect your breasts with your arms at your sides. Then, raise your arms high overhead and look for any changes in the contour, any swelling or dimpling of the skin, or changes in the nipples.
- When lying down – Place your right arm behind your head. Using your left hand, move the pads of your fingers around your right breast gently covering the entire breast area and armpit with light, medium and firm pressure. Squeeze the nipple; check for discharge and lumps. Repeat these steps for your left breast.

Knowing what changes to look for does not take the place of having regular mammograms and other screening tests.

Report to a healthcare provider right away any changes in:

- How the breast or nipple feels, such as nipple tenderness or a lump or thickening in or near the breast or underarm area; a change in the skin texture or an enlargement of pores in the skin of the breast; a lump in the breast.
- Breast or nipple appearance, such as any unexplained change in the size or shape of the breast; dimpling anywhere on the breast; nipple that is turned slightly inward or inverted; skin of the breast, areola or nipple that becomes scaly, red or swollen, or may have ridges or pitting.
- Or any nipple discharge, particularly clear discharge or bloody discharge.



Did you know?

- The average risk of a woman in the United States developing breast cancer sometime in her life is about 13%. This means there is a 1 in 8 chance she will develop breast cancer.
- The chance that a woman will die from breast cancer is about 1 in 38 (about 2.6%).
- Since 2007, breast cancer death rates have been steady in women younger than 50 but have continued to decrease in older women.
- At this time there are more than 3.5 million breast cancer survivors in the United States.

(Source: American Cancer Society)

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