



Health & Wellness

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month

The National Breast Cancer Awareness Month is dedicated to increasing awareness about the importance of the early detection of breast cancer through a nationwide campaign held in October. The focus on awareness aims to spread the message that early detection of breast cancer, followed by prompt treatment, saves lives.

Breast cancer is a disease in which cancer cells form in the tissues of the breast.

Women in the United States get breast cancer more than any other type of cancer except for skin cancer. It is second only to lung cancer as a cause of cancer death in women.

Each year it is estimated that nearly 200,000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer and more than 40,000 will die. Approximately 1,700 men will also be diagnosed with breast cancer and 450 will die each year. The evaluation of men with breast masses is similar to that in women, including mammography.

No woman wants to receive this diagnosis, but hearing the words “breast cancer” doesn’t always mean an end. It can be the beginning of learning how to fight, getting the facts and finding hope.

Source: American Cancer Society

RISK FACTORS

- **Age:** Half of all women diagnosed are over age 65
- **Weight:** Being obese or overweight
- **Diet & Lifestyle:** Lack of physical activity, a diet high in saturated fat, and alcoholic intake of more than two drinks per day
- **Menstrual & Reproductive History:** Early menstruation or late menopause, having your first child at an older age or not having given birth, or taking birth control pills for more than ten years if you are under 35
- **Family & Personal History:** A family history of breast cancer—particularly a mother or sister—or a personal history of breast cancer of benign (non-cancerous) breast disease
- **Medical & Other Factors:** Dense breast tissue (often identified by a mammogram), past radiation therapy to the breast or chest area. A history of hormone treatments—such as estrogen and progesterone, or gene changes—including BRCA1, BRCA2 and others

Generally, early breast cancer does not cause pain. Even so, a woman should see her health care provider about breast pain or any other breast cancer symptoms that do not go away.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

Look for these signs:

- **A change in how the breast or nipple feels:** You may experience nipple tenderness or notice a lump or thickening in or near the breast or in the underarm area.
- **A change in how the breast or nipple looks:** This could mean a change in the size or shape of the breast or a nipple that is turned slightly inward. In addition, the skin of the breast, areola or nipple may appear scaly, red or swollen or may have ridges or pitting that resembles the skin of an orange.

- **Nipple discharge:** Nipple discharge refers to any fluid that seeps out of the nipple in a nonlactating woman. Nonmilk discharge comes out of your breasts through the same nipple openings that carry milk.

EARLY BREAST CANCER DETECTION PLAN

Taking a few minutes to do a breast self-exam a minimum of once a month can make a lifetime of difference. Nearly 70% of all breast cancers are found through self-exams and with early detection the 5-year survival rate is 98%. If you find a lump, schedule an appointment with your doctor, but don’t panic—8 out of 10 lumps are not cancerous. For additional peace of mind, call your doctor whenever you have concerns. Remember, early detection saves lives!

- **Beginning at age 20:** Perform breast self-exams and look for any signs of change
- **Age 20 to 39:** Schedule clinical breast exams every three years
- **By the age of 40:** Have a baseline mammogram and annual clinical breast exams
- **Ages 40 to 49:** Have a mammogram every one to two years depending on previous findings
- **Ages 50 and older:** Have a mammogram every year
- **All Ages:** Record personal exams, mammograms and doctors’ appointments on a calendar or in a detailed file. Maintain a healthy weight, follow a low-fat diet, get regular exercise, quit smoking, and reduce alcohol consumption.

