



## BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH



### NATIONAL BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH



“If all women age 40 and older took advantage of early detection methods – mammography plus clinical breast exam – breast cancer death rates would drop much further, up to 30 percent,” says Lisa Johnson, MD, Chief Medical Director at the Department of Juvenile Justice.



NATIONAL BREAST CANCER  
AWARENESS MONTH

Celebrating 25 Years  
of Awareness, Education,  
and Empowerment

October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month (NBCAM). Since the program began in 1985, mammography rates have more than doubled for women age 50 and older and breast cancer deaths have declined. This is exciting progress, but there are still women who do not take advantage of early detection at all and others who do not get screening mammograms and clinical breast exams at regular intervals.

- ❖ Women age 65 and older are less likely to get mammograms than younger women, even though breast cancer risk increases with age.
- ❖ Hispanic women have fewer mammograms than Caucasian women and African American women.
- ❖ Women below poverty level are less likely than women at higher incomes to have had a mammogram within the past two years.
- ❖ Mammography use has increased for all groups except American Indians and Alaska Natives.

**“The key to mammography screening is that it be done routinely – once is not enough.”**

#### What is breast cancer?

Cancer is a disease in which cells in the body grow out of control. When cancer starts in the breast, it is called breast cancer. The breast is made up of three main parts: glands, ducts, and connective tissue. Sometimes breast cells become abnormal and grow faster than normal cells. These extra cells form a mass called a tumor. Some tumors are “benign,” or not cancerous. Other tumors are “malignant,” meaning they are cancerous and have the ability to spread to other parts of the breast and body and disrupt normal functions in those areas.

#### What raises a woman’s chance of getting breast cancer?

Several factors may affect your risk of developing breast cancer, including—

- Getting older.
- Not having children, or having your first child later in life.
- Starting your first menstrual period at an early age.
- Beginning menopause at a late age.
- Having a personal history of breast cancer or certain benign breast diseases, such as atypical ductal hyperplasia.



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- Having close family relatives (such as a mother, sister, father, or daughter) who have had breast cancer.
- Having a genetic condition, such as certain mutations in your BRCA1 or BRCA2 genes.
- Having been treated with radiation therapy to the breast or chest.
- Being overweight, particularly after menopause.
- Using hormone replacement therapy for a long time.
- Using oral contraceptives.
- Drinking alcohol.
- Being physically inactive.



### Who gets breast cancer?

All women are at risk for breast cancer. Men can also get breast cancer, but this is rare. Not counting skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common cancer in women of all combined major racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Among Hispanic women, it is the most common cause of death from cancer, and it is the second most common cause of death from cancer among white, black, Asian or Pacific Islander, and American Indian or Alaska Native women. In 2006, (the most recent year for which statistics are available), 191,410 women were diagnosed with breast cancer, and 40,820 women died from the disease.† † *U.S. Cancer Statistics Working Group. United States Cancer Statistics: 1999–2006 Incidence and Mortality Web-based Report. Atlanta (GA): Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and National Cancer Institute; 2010. Although more white women get breast cancer, more black women die from it.*

### What are the symptoms?

When breast cancer starts out, it is too small to feel and does not cause signs and symptoms. As it grows, however, breast cancer can cause changes in how the breast looks or feels. Symptoms may include—

- A new lump in the breast.
- A lump that has changed.
- A change in the size or shape of the breast.
- Pain in the breast or nipple that does not go away.
- Flaky, red, or swollen skin anywhere on the breast.
- A nipple that is very tender or that suddenly turns inward.
- Blood or any other type of fluid coming from the nipple that is not milk when nursing a baby.

*If you have any of these symptoms, talk to a health care professional. They may be caused by something other than cancer, but the only way to know is to see a health care professional.*

### How does breast cancer grow and spread?

- To grow, malignant breast tumors need to be fed. They get nourishment by developing new blood vessels in a process called angiogenesis. The new blood vessels supply the tumor with nutrients that promote growth.
- As the malignant breast tumor grows, it can expand into nearby tissue. This process is called invasion.
- Cells can also break away from the primary, or main, tumor and spread to other parts of the body. The cells spread by traveling through the blood stream and lymphatic system. This process is called metastasis.
- When malignant breast cells appear in a new location, they begin to divide and grow out of control again as they create another tumor. Even though the new tumor is growing in another part of the body, it is still called breast cancer. The most common locations of metastatic breast cancer are the lungs, liver, bones and brain.
- Every day, cells in your body divide, grow and die. Most of the time cells divide and grow in an orderly manner. But sometimes cells grow out of control. This kind of growth of cells forms a mass or lump called a tumor. Tumors are either *benign* or *malignant*.

- **Benign [bee-NINE] tumors**

Benign tumors are not cancerous. But left untreated, some can pose a health risk. So they are often removed. When these tumors are removed, they typically do not reappear. The cells of a benign tumor do not invade nearby tissue or spread to other parts of the body.

- **Malignant [ma-LIG-nant] tumors**

Malignant tumors are made of abnormal cells and are cancerous. Malignant tumor cells can invade nearby tissue and spread to other parts of the body. A malignant tumor that develops in the breast is called breast cancer.

### Why does breast cancer grow?

We all have genes that control the way our cells divide and grow. When these genes do not work like they should, a genetic error, or *mutation*, has occurred. Mutations may be inherited or spontaneous. Inherited mutations are ones you were born with — an abnormal gene that one of your parents passed on to you at birth. Inherited



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mutations of specific genes, such as the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes, increase a woman's risk of developing breast cancer. Spontaneous mutations occur within your body during your lifetime. The actual cause or causes of mutations still remains unknown. Researchers have identified two types of genes that are important to cell growth. Errors in these genes turn normal cells into cancerous ones.

### But remember...

Cells can grow out of control before any symptoms of the disease appear. That is why breast screening to find early changes is so important. If breast cancer is found early, there are more treatment options and improved chance for survival. Susan G. Komen for the Cure® recommends that women 40 years and older have a mammogram every year. If you have a history of breast cancer in your family, talk with your doctor about your personal risk, including when to start getting mammograms and how often to have them.

If your mother or sister had breast cancer before menopause, you may need to start getting mammograms and yearly clinical breast exams before age 40. It is important for all women to have clinical breast exams at least every three years starting at age 20 and every year after age 40.

### How can I prevent it?

Scientists are studying how best to prevent breast cancer. Ways to help lower your risk of getting breast cancer include—

- Stay physically active by getting regular exercise.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Avoid using hormone replacement therapy (HRT), or find out the risks and benefits of HRT and if it is right for you.
- Limit the amount of alcohol that you drink.

### Is there a test that can find breast cancer early?

Mammograms are the best tests for finding breast cancer early. Mammograms are a series of X-ray pictures of the breast that allow doctors to look for early signs of breast cancer, sometimes up to three years before it can be felt. When breast cancer is found early, treatment is most effective, and many women go on to live long and healthy lives.

### When should I get a mammogram?

Most women should have their first mammogram at age 50 and then have another mammogram every two years until age 74. Talk to your health professional if you have any symptoms or changes in your breast, or if breast cancer runs in your family. He or she may recommend that you have mammograms before age 50 or more often than usual.

### What happens if my mammogram is abnormal?

If your mammogram is abnormal or more tests are required, do not panic. Many women need additional tests, and most are not diagnosed with cancer. An abnormal mammogram does not always mean you have cancer. It does mean that you will need to have some additional X-rays or other tests before your doctor can be sure. Other tests may include an ultrasound (picture taken of the breast using sound waves) or a biopsy (removing tissue samples to be looked at closely under a microscope). You may be referred to a breast specialist or a surgeon, because these doctors are experts in diagnosing breast problems.

### Where can I find a free or low-cost mammogram?

If you have a low income, or do not have insurance, and are between the ages of 40 and 64, you may be able to get a free or low-cost mammogram through the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program in your community. To learn more, call 1-800-CDC-INFO or visit [www.cdc.gov/cancer/nbccedp](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/nbccedp).

### Resources for this Article and More Information:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: 1-800-CDC-INFO or [www.cdc.gov/cancer](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer)
- National Cancer Institute: 1-800-4-CANCER or [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)
- American Cancer Society: 1-800-ACS-2345 or [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)
- People Living with Cancer/American Society of Clinical Oncology: 1-888-651-3038 or [www.plwc.org](http://www.plwc.org)
- National Breast Cancer Awareness Website or [www.nbcam.org](http://www.nbcam.org)
- Susan G. Komen for the Cure® 1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636) [www.komen.org](http://www.komen.org).