



BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH



NATIONAL BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

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. Just as relevant today as it was more than 20 years ago when the organization was founded, National Breast Cancer Awareness Month (NBCAM) wants women of all ages to know that breast health is a year-round concern. Early detection as well as educating yourself about breast cancer can be two of the best possible “medicines” toward fighting the disease. In addition, if you or someone you know has survived breast cancer, it is just as important to know your risk of recurrence, or the return of the disease. Breast cancer is the second most common cancer among women, and breast cancer recurrence is possible even in women who have had a mastectomy (or breast removal).

BREAST CANCER STRIKES AFRICAN AMERICANS EARLIER, IS MORE LETHAL

The American Cancer Society estimated more than 19,000 African-American women would be diagnosed with breast cancer this year -- the second-most common cancer among African-American women, surpassed only by lung cancer. And while the incidence of breast cancer is about 12 percent lower in African-American women than in white women, with African-American women, it often strikes at an earlier age, and the mortality rate is higher.

According to the Society's “Cancer Facts and Figures for African American Women” booklet, “Factors that contribute to the higher death rates among African-American women include differences in access to and utilization of early detection and treatment, risk factors that are differentially distributed by race or socio-economic status, or biological differences associated with race.”

However, it is not just a matter of access to health care. Even after accounting for income and access to strong health care, “Poorer outcomes among African-American women persist. There is also evidence that aggressive tumor characteristics are more common in African-American women than white women.”

Promote breast health using key dates



Since the American Cancer Society recommends that women begin to conduct monthly self-breast examinations at age 20, mark a date on your calendar each month for a self-exam. Women in their 20's and 30's should also have a clinical breast exam as part of their regular exam from a health expert. As early as age 35, women should begin annual mammography's, or as recommended by your physician, and yearly clinical breast exams by a health expert. These may be scheduled around a special date such as your birthday or an anniversary. Women under 40 with a family history of breast cancer should consult their health care provider, who may stress the importance of appropriate screening and early detection and when to begin mammography.

As a regular activity, when you are in the shower, check your breasts for any changes. Some of the most common signs of breast cancer could be the appearance of a lump or a change in breast size or shape. Look for changes in the color of your breast as well as skin changes (scaly or itchy areas, dimpling, and puckering) or a new pain in one spot. Any change from what is normal should be reported to your doctor.



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Keep in mind that while some people experience clear physical symptoms or warning signs of breast cancer, others with breast cancer do not. That is why screening is so important.

2.3 million women in the United States are living with a breast cancer diagnosis. A diagnosis of breast cancer brings with it many questions, and requires sudden decision-making about surgery and treatment. With this comes the need to learn an overwhelming amount of new information at a rapid rate, and to become familiar with new concepts and strange medical jargon.

When breast cancer is detected at an early stage of development, a number of effective treatment options are available. A woman and her physician will choose the treatment that is right for her, based on the location and extent of the cancer, her age and preferences, and the risks and benefits of each treatment. The basic treatment choices for breast cancer are **surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, and hormonal therapy**, not necessarily in that order. Local treatments such as breast surgery and radiation therapy are focused on the breast itself to remove or destroy the cancer cells confined to the breast. Systemic treatments such as chemotherapy and hormonal therapy aim to destroy the cancer cells that may have spread throughout the body.

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Breast cancer affects one in eight women during their lives. Breast cancer kills more women in the United States than any cancer except lung cancer. No one knows why some women get breast cancer, but there are a number of risk factors. Risks that you cannot change include:

- Age - the chance of getting breast cancer rises as a woman gets older.
- Genes - there are two genes, BRCA1 and BRCA2, that greatly increase the risk. Women who have family members with breast or ovarian cancer may wish to be tested.
- Personal factors - beginning periods before age 12 or going through menopause after age 55.
- Other risks include being overweight, using hormone replacement therapy, taking birth control pills, drinking alcohol, not having children or having your first child after age 35 or having dense breasts.
- Symptoms of breast cancer may include a lump in the breast, a change in size or shape of the breast or discharge from a nipple. Breast self-exam and mammography can help find breast cancer early when it is most treatable. Treatment may consist of radiation, lumpectomy, mastectomy, chemotherapy and hormone therapy.
- Men can have breast cancer, too, but the number of cases is small.

Resources: *(Click on the Hyperlinks below for article references and more information.)*



[National Breast Cancer Awareness Website](#); [Black America Web](#); [Cancer Facts and Figures for African American Women](#); [Susan G. Komen for the Cure: About Breast Cancer](#); [American Cancer Society, Additional Resources for Breast Cancer](#); [National Cancer Institute: Breast Cancer](#); [ABC News: A Girlfriend's Guide to Breast Cancer](#); [Breastcancer.org](#); [CancerCare](#); [American Cancer Society on Breast Cancer](#); [Mayo Clinic](#); [The Susan Love Foundation](#); [National Institutes of Health](#); [People Living with Cancer](#); [Y-ME National Breast Cancer Organization](#); [CANCER101.org](#); [National Comprehensive Cancer Network](#).