

Breast Self-Awareness



Breast cancer is second only to skin cancer in women in the United States. It is found most often in women over 50, but approximately 10% of new cases are being found in women under 45. Although rare, men can get breast cancer, too. Breast cancer can be successfully treated.

While screening tests can find cancer early, when it's most treatable, it is also very important that everyone (men and women) do self-exams monthly as many people have found lumps during self-exams that either mammograms missed, or the lumps formed after their last mammogram.

Here are some tips for decreasing your chances of getting or dying from breast cancer:

Know your risk. You may have a higher risk of developing breast cancer if:

Risk factors you cannot change:

- You are older than 50
- You started your period before age 12 and menopause after age 50
- You have dense breasts
- You previously had breast cancer or certain non-cancerous breast diseases
- You took the drug diethylstilbestrol (DES) while pregnant, or your mother took the drug when she was pregnant with you

Risk factors you can change:

- Sedentary lifestyle – it's never too late to increase your activity level
- You are overweight or obese – healthy eating is key to losing weight
- You take or have taken hormone replacement therapy that includes both estrogen and progesterone or certain birth control pills
- Drinking alcohol – breast cancer risk increases with alcohol consumption

Get screened

- If you are at a higher risk, ask your doctor which screening tests are right for you
- If you are at average risk, the United States Preventative Services Task Force (USPSTF), recommends having a mammogram every two years if you are between 50 and 74 years old; women between 40 and 49 should consult with their doctor to determine when to start getting mammograms
- Have a clinical breast exam at least every 3 years starting at 20, and every year starting at 40
- Other forms of screening include medical infrared imaging, or thermography, and ultrasound

Know what is normal for you

See your health care provider right away if you notice any of these changes:

- Lump in breast or armpit
- Swelling/thickening, warmth, redness or darkening of part of the breast
- Change in the size or shape of the breast, including dimpling or puckering of the skin
- Itchy, scaly sore or rash on the nipple, pulling in of your nipple/pain in nipple area
- Nipple discharge other than breastmilk
- New pain in one spot that doesn't go away

Note: these symptoms can be signs of non-cancerous conditions as well as breast cancer.

Make healthy lifestyle choices

- Maintain a healthy weight
- Add exercise to your daily routine
- Limit alcohol consumption

(Sources: <http://ww5.komen.org/BreastCancer/BreastSelfAwareness.html>, 7/1/2019; <https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/index.htm>, 7/2/2019; <https://www.johnsonmedicalassociates.com/breast-cancer/>, 7/2/2019)

For further training on this or other topics please call Milestone HCQU Northwest at 814-728-9400.