

Breast Cancer Awareness

After skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common cancer found in American women. The good news, however, is that since 1990 the death rates from breast cancer have been decreasing. These decreases are thought to be the result of treatment advances, earlier detection through screening, and increased awareness.

What causes Breast Cancer?

It is not completely understood what causes breast cancer, but we do know that breast cancer occurs when breast cells begin to grow abnormally. These mutated cells grow more rapidly than healthy cells and can accumulate to form a tumor. Some tumors are “benign” or noncancerous and don’t cause major health issues. However, a malignant (cancerous) breast tumor can continue to spread throughout the breast to the lymph nodes or to other parts of the body. Finding breast cancer early is the key to successful treatment.

Signs and Symptoms

Signs and symptoms of breast cancer may include:

- A breast lump or thickening that feels different from surrounding tissue.
- Bloody discharge from the nipple.
- Change in the size and shape of the breast.
- Changes to the skin over the breast, such as dimpling.
- Inverted nipple.
- Peeling or flaking of the nipple area.
- Redness or pitting of the skin over the breast.

It is important to note that many women have some lumpiness in their breasts which is often caused by other conditions, such as fibrocystic disease. Fibrocystic disease is noncancerous and common signs include lumpiness, tenderness and breast pain. It is recommended to perform monthly breast self-exams which can give you a greater awareness of the condition of your breasts. If you find any lumps or unusual signs, contact a healthcare provider for

further evaluation. Your evaluation may include a clinical breast examination, mammogram, ultrasound or MRI of the breast, or biopsy.

Risk Factors

Most women with breast cancer have no known risk factors other than simply being female. However, increasing age, a personal history of breast cancer, a family history of breast cancer, or inherited gene mutations (5-10 percent of breast cancers are linked to gene mutations passed on by generations) can increase your risks for breast cancer.

Decreasing Risk

Decrease your risk by practicing the following habits:

- Maintain a healthy weight; eat 5 servings a day of fruit and vegetables.
- Exercise most days of the week; aim for 30 minutes a day.
- Drink alcohol in moderation, if at all; limit yourself to less than one drink a day.
- Don’t smoke; quit if you do smoke.
- Limit postmenopausal hormone therapy; combination hormone therapy may increase the risk of breast cancer.
- Talk to your doctor about breast cancer screening. Most guidelines recommend women with average risk to begin annual mammograms by age 40.

Download your free booklet on breast health by going to: http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/pdf/cdc_mammogram_brochure.pdf

Resources:

<http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/>; <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/breast-cancer/DS00328>; <http://www.nationalbreastcancer.org/About-Breast-Cancer/What-Is-Breast-Cancer.aspx>

To speak with an EAP professional, please call: **800.327.2384**

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