

What are the Risk Factors?

Researchers are still not sure why breast cancer affects some women and not others. As a result, there is no way of preventing it yet. However, scientists have begun to identify some risk factors that may increase your chances of getting breast cancer. For example, women who have had breast cancer in their family history may be at a higher risk than women who have not.

While genetics is a factor that is beyond our control, there are some risk factors that can be changed. Living a healthy lifestyle can help to reduce the chance of breast cancer. Eating healthy, maintaining a healthy weight, exercising regularly and avoiding smoking are a few ways that women can reduce the risk of breast cancer.

While taking charge of these risk factors is important to help avoid breast cancer, the most important step is to detect it as early as possible to improve and facilitate treatment.

Early Detection Guidelines

from the American Cancer Society

Age 40 and older

- Annual mammogram
- Annual clinical breast examination
- Monthly breast self-examination

Age 20-39

- Clinical breast examination every three years
- Monthly breast self-examination



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Breast Cancer Awareness



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Breast Cancer Awareness Saves Lives

Breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in women and, although it can't be prevented, knowing the warning signs are key in its prevention. By arming themselves with the most up-to-date information, women can reduce their risk of being one of the thousands who are affected by this deadly disease.

Who is at Risk?

While it is a common myth that younger women are not at risk for breast cancer, the American Cancer Society reports that 50 percent of breast cancer cases occur in women under the age of 60. Although breast cancer risks do increase with age, all age groups should be on the lookout for early signs of this deadly disease.

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What is a Mammogram?

A mammogram is an x-ray of the breast used to detect and evaluate breast abnormalities. An annual mammogram is recommended for women who are considered at a high risk for reasons such as genetics, and for all women over 40.

During the exam, each breast is slightly compressed so that the machine may produce a clearer and more complete picture. It is recommended that the test be performed in the week after a woman's menstrual cycle to reduce breast tenderness. The picture is taken with a very low-dose x-ray to reduce the radiation.

Mammograms can be scheduled at local hospitals, mammography centers or health clinics. It is important to make sure that the facility is one that you feel comfortable with, that is certified and meets the requirements of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The American Cancer Society suggests that while mammograms do not detect 100 percent of all cancers, they remain the most effective and valuable tool for detecting breast cancer at its earliest stages to increase a victim's chance of survival and full recovery.

Early Detection

Detecting breast cancer early can be the difference between life and death. In fact, when breast cancer is found early, the survival rate is better than 95 percent. Because identifying this disease early is so vital in helping breast cancer victims survive and recover, experts recommend regular mammograms, clinical breast exams and self-examinations to spot any of the warning signs as early as possible.

Warning signs may include a lump or thickening in the breast or armpit, a change in the size or shape of the breast, discharge from the nipple or a change in color or texture of the breast. The National Breast Cancer Foundation reports that 8 out of 10 lumps are found to be not cancerous, but any of these symptoms should still be reported to your physician.



Breast Cancer Reconstructive Surgery

For breast cancer survivors, reconstructive surgery is often a valuable step to gaining a full sense of recovery. The General Assembly has passed legislation that requires insurance carriers that cover mastectomies to provide coverage for reconstructive surgery. The emotional health and physical well-being of breast cancer victims is an important part of a complete recovery. If you have questions about your own health care coverage, call your insurance carrier to make sure you are protected.

Early Screening for Breast and Cervical Cancer

A state law requires the state Department of Health to provide annual screening mammograms, clinical breast exams, pap smears and pelvic exams for eligible women between the ages of 40 and 64. These life-saving screenings are now available for women who currently may not be able to afford it.

Women whose family income does not exceed 250 percent of the federal poverty level with no other access to health insurance coverage are eligible for screening under the program.