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Breast Cancer: What You Need to Know

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**. Except for skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common cancer in American women.

Breast cancer **screening** means checking a woman's breasts for cancer before she has any symptoms. A **mammogram** is an X-ray picture of the breast. Mammograms are the best way to find breast cancer early, when it is easier to treat and before it is big enough to feel or cause symptoms.

Most women who are 50 to 74 years old should have a screening mammogram every two years. If you are 40 to 49 years old, or think you may have a higher risk of breast cancer, ask your doctor when to have a screening mammogram.

Some things may increase your risk

If you have **risk factors**, you may be more likely to get breast cancer. Talk to your doctor about ways to lower your risk and about screening.

Reproductive risk factors

- Being younger when you had your first menstrual period.
- Never giving birth, or being older at the birth of your first child.
- Starting menopause at a later age.
- Using hormone replacement therapy for a long time.

Other risk factors

- Getting older.
- A personal history of breast cancer, dense breasts, or some other breast problems.

- A family history of breast cancer (parent, sibling, or child).
- Changes in your breast cancer-related genes (BRCA1 or BRCA2).
- Getting radiation therapy to the breast or chest.
- Being overweight, especially after menopause

Symptoms

Some warning signs of breast cancer are—

- A lump or pain in the breast.
- Thickening or swelling of part of the breast.
- Irritation or dimpling of breast skin.
- Redness or flaky skin on the breast.
- Pulling in of the nipple or pain in the nipple area.
- Fluid other than breast milk from the nipple, especially blood.
- A change in the size or the shape of the breast.

Can't afford a mammogram?

If you have a low income or do not have insurance and are between the ages of 40 and 64, you may qualify for a free or low-cost mammogram through CDC's National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program. To learn more, call (800) CDC-INFO.

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