Breast Cancer: Early Detection & Ways to Lower Your Risk

Breast Self-Exams

- **How to Perform One**
  - **In the shower:** using the pads of your fingers, move around your entire breast in a circular pattern moving from the outside to the center, checking the entire breast and armpit area. Check both breasts each month feeling for any lump, thickening, or hardened knot. Notice any changes and get lumps evaluated by your healthcare provider.
  - **In front of a mirror:** First, visually inspect your breasts with your arms at your sides. Next, raise your arms high overhead looking for any changes in the contour, any selling, or dimpling of the skin, or changes in the nipples. Then, rest your palms on your hips and press firmly to flex your chest muscles. Left and right breasts will not match exactly (few women's breasts do), but once again look for any dimpling, puckering, or changes, particularly on one side.
  - **Lying down:** When lying down, the breast tissue spreads out evenly along the chest wall. Place a pillow under your right shoulder and your right arm behind your head. Using your left hand, move the pads of your fingers around your right breast gently in small circular motions using light, medium, and firm pressure, and covering the entire breast area and armpit; repeat these steps for your left breast.

- **When to Perform One**
  - Adult women of all ages (usually starting from age 20 on up) are encouraged to perform breast self-exams at least once a month.
  - Choose the time during your menstrual cycle when your breasts are the least tender. Hormone levels fluctuate causing a change in breast tissue, so it is best to perform a self-exam 7-10 days after your period.
  - If you've already hit menopause, you can choose the same day of each month on which to do the exam.

Ways to Lower Your Risk of Breast Cancer

- Limit alcohol consumption to no more than one drink per day; the more alcohol you drink, the greater your risk of developing breast cancer.
- Watch your weight; being overweight or obese increases your risk of breast cancer, especially for postmenopausal women and women who gain weight as adults.
- Drink green tea; studies have linked regular consumption of green tea to lower cancer occurrences.
- Make antioxidants a big part of your diet; fruits, vegetables, and other foods high in antioxidants lower the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, and various forms of cancer. One easy tip: the more colorful your diet the better since antioxidants and other phytochemicals are usually what give fruits and veggies their color.
- Try to incorporate turmeric when spicing up your food; in a study done on mice, it prevented the spread of breast cancer and also may prevent metastases from occurring in many different types of cancer.
- Quit smoking; while evidence is limited, more studies in recent years have found that long-term heavy smoking is linked to a higher risk of breast cancer especially among women who started smoking when they were young.
- If you’re planning to have kids, breastfeed you baby.

**Exercise**

American Research Society studies found that walking for at least 2.5 hours/week is associated with a 14% lower risk of developing breast cancer after menopause.

The most active women in this study lowered their cancer risk by 25% compared to the least active.

Many other studies also show regular exercise can help women lower their risk of cancer, whether or not they were overweight and even if they gained weight.