

## Think Pink: Breast Cancer Awareness



We see it everywhere: on bumper stickers, car magnets, lapels and T-shirts. The pink ribbon is a well-known symbol that has brought increasing awareness to a serious disease.

It seems that all of us know someone who has had breast cancer – a neighbor, a friend, a mother or a sister. And it's no wonder. About one in eight women in the U.S. will develop invasive breast cancer in her lifetime. Not only that, it's the second most common cancer found in U.S. women.<sup>1</sup>

### What is breast cancer?

To put it simply, breast cancer occurs when cells within the breast tissue divide and grow abnormally. The most common types of breast cancer are found in the breast's milk-producing glands (the lobules) and the milk ducts. When the cancer is invasive, the cancerous cells have spread from the lobules and ducts to surrounding tissue and possibly to other parts of the body. In noninvasive cancer (carcinoma in situ), the cancerous cells have stayed where they originated and have not spread to surrounding tissue.<sup>2</sup>

## Looking at risk factors

Risk factors aren't causes of breast cancer, but they are associated with a greater chance of developing the disease. Having one or more risk factors doesn't mean you will get breast cancer. In fact, most women who have several risk factors never get the disease.<sup>3</sup>

Risk factors for breast cancer include:

- Being a woman.
- Getting older. As you age, the risk of having breast cancer increases. One out of eight invasive breast cancers are found in women under age 45. In women 55 and older, that number jumps to two out of three breast cancers.
- Having a family history of breast cancer.
- Having your first child after age 35.
- Starting menopause after age 55.
- Being younger than 12 at the time of your first period.
- Current or recent use of birth control pills.
- A lack of physical exercise.
- Drinking alcohol. The risk of breast cancer increases with amount of alcohol consumed. Women who have two to five drinks daily have one and a half times the risk of women who don't drink.
- Being overweight or obese.<sup>3,4</sup>

There are some risk factors you can't control, like your age and your family background. Other risk factors are within your control – things like limiting your alcohol intake and increasing the amount of physical activity you get. Other ways to reduce your



risk include eating a healthy diet; not using post-menopausal hormone therapy; and getting screened regularly.<sup>3,5</sup>

## Screening

Screening exams for breast cancer look for evidence of the disease before signs and symptoms appear. The size of the cancer and the stage at which it's found are important determinants in treatment and survival.<sup>6</sup>

There are three main screening tests: mammograms, clinical breast exams and breast self-exams. Your health care provider can tell you which exams are best for you and how often you should have them.

**Mammogram:** This is an X-ray of the breast. Having a mammogram is the best way to detect breast cancer early, when treatment may be more effective.

**Clinical breast exam:** In a clinical exam, a doctor or nurse feels for lumps and other changes in the breast.

**Breast self-exam:** This exam is a self-check of your own breasts for lumps and changes in size and shape.<sup>7</sup>

## Know the symptoms

Symptoms of breast cancer vary from person to person. Some people may have no symptoms at all, which is why getting the recommended screening tests is so important.<sup>8</sup> The increased use of mammography means the number of breast cancers found early is growing. But not all breast cancers are found by this method.<sup>9</sup> Some warning signs of breast cancer include:

- A new lump in the breast or armpit
- Thickening or swelling of part of the breast
- Irritation or dimpling of the skin
- Red or flaky skin in the breast or nipple area
- Pulling in of the nipple or pain in the nipple area
- Nipple discharge other than breast milk, including blood
- Change in the size or shape of the breast
- Pain in any area of the breast<sup>8,9</sup>

Having these symptom doesn't necessarily mean that you have breast cancer. However, it's important to talk to you doctor as soon as possible about any concerns.

Incidence rates of breast cancer, which saw an increase in the 1980s and 1990s, decreased by 3.5 percent annually from 2001 to 2004. Not only that,

## Male Breast Cancer

Though breast cancer is found overwhelmingly in women, men can develop it too. In the United States, that ratio is one man to every 100 women who are diagnosed. It was estimated in 2008 that almost 2,000 men would be diagnosed with the disease and about 450 would die of it.<sup>10</sup>

## Did You Know?

Breast cancer rarely occurs during pregnancy. But it's the most common cancer detected in pregnant women, occurring in about 1 in 3,000 pregnancies. Because breasts become larger and more sensitive during pregnancy, it's more difficult for women to notice lumps in the breast. For this reason, it's vital that pregnant women practice monthly breast self-exams and to get routine clinical exams during pregnancy.<sup>11</sup>

## Resources

The National Cancer Institute (NCI) has a hotline staffed by specialists who can answer your questions and send you booklets, fact sheets and other materials. You can reach the hotline at 800-4-CANCER. For access to printed materials and other information on the NCI website, go to cancer.gov.

Visit Susan G. Komen for the Cure at [komen.org](http://komen.org) for the latest information on diagnosis, treatment, risk factors, screening and more. You'll also find educational materials and interactive tools.

death rates from breast cancer have been declining since around 1990.<sup>1</sup> An increased awareness of breast cancer may be part of the reason for these falling rates. With this in mind, make sure you keep up with scheduled mammograms – and encourage your friends to do the same. You just might save a life.

Visit [anthem.com](http://anthem.com) for more ways to get healthy – and stay healthy.

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Certain factual or statistical information was derived from the following sources:

<sup>1</sup> American Cancer Society website, *What Are the Key Statistics for Breast Cancer?* (March 2, 2009); cancer.org. <sup>2</sup> Mayo Clinic website, *Types of Breast Cancer* (December 28, 2007); mayoclinic.com; Susan G. Komen for the Cure website, *What Is Breast Cancer?* (2009); komen.org. <sup>3</sup> American Cancer Society website, *What Are the Risk Factors for Breast Cancer?* (March 2, 2009); cancer.org. <sup>4</sup> Susan G. Komen for the Cure website, *What Affects Your Risk of Getting Breast Cancer?* (2009); komen.org. <sup>5</sup> Centers for Disease Control website, *Reducing Risk* (March 10, 2009); cdc.gov. <sup>6</sup> American Cancer Society website, *Can Breast Cancer Be Found Early?* (March 2, 2009); cancer.org. <sup>7</sup> Centers for Disease Control website, *Screening* (October 6, 2006); cdc.gov. <sup>8</sup> Centers for Disease Control website, *Symptoms* (October 6, 2006); cdc.gov. <sup>9</sup> American Cancer Society website, *How Is Breast Cancer Diagnosed?* (March 2, 2009); cancer.org. <sup>10</sup> Susan G. Komen for the Cure website, *Breast Cancer in Men* (2009); komen.org. <sup>11</sup> Susan G. Komen for the Cure website, *Breast Cancer in Pregnancy* (2009); komen.org.

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