

BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

Lily Shah, MD

October is National Breast Cancer Awareness month and specifically, Oct 20th is National Mammography Day.

Unfortunately, breast cancer is an all too common problem in the United States. Breast cancer represents 15% of all the new cancer cases in the U.S. There will be an estimated 250,000 new cases of breast cancer diagnosed in women in 2017 and 2400 new cases diagnosed in men; that means that **1 out of every 8 women** in the United States will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime. One piece of good news amidst these sobering statistics is that ***fewer women are dying of breast cancer than they were before***. Part of this success is due to the fact that we are finding breast cancer earlier, at a lower stage, with the increased use of screening mammograms. A smaller and earlier stage breast cancer is more curable than one that has had a chance to grow and spread. Also, years of research has led to many more treatment options including anti-estrogen, targeted and chemotherapy treatments than we have ever had before.

What are some risk factors for developing breast cancer?

There are a number of risk factors that have been identified that might increase a person's risk of developing breast cancer.

- Older age
- Dense breasts
- Family history of breast cancer
- Personal history of breast-related disease (ie., a pre-cancerous lesion such as ductal or lobular carcinoma in situ)
- Radiation therapy to the breast or chest
- Increased levels of estrogen exposure in the body (either through estrogen-containing hormone replacement therapy after menopause, early start of menstruation or late end of menstruation, or older age at the time of first birth or never giving birth)
- Drinking alcohol

So, what can you do to reduce your chances of developing breast cancer or increase the chances of early detection?

- **Screening mammogram**
 - This is a mammogram that a woman would have when they are feeling well and have no specific breast-related complaints or pain. ***Many early stage breast cancers are found by a screening mammogram and much earlier than when somebody would have felt a lump in their breast.***
 - Please talk with your doctor about the appropriate time to start having screening mammograms. Different medical societies have published their own guidelines on their recommended timing and frequency to have a screening mammogram. I personally recommend that women of average risk start having a yearly screening mammogram at age 40.
- Limiting alcohol consumption
 - Several studies have shown that for every 10 grams of alcohol consumed regularly per day (about 1 drink), there was a 7-12% increased risk of developing breast cancer.
- Regular aerobic exercise
 - Regular aerobic exercise of 4 hours or more per week has been shown to decrease the risk of developing breast cancer by about 12%.
- Maintaining normal BMI (body mass index)

- Higher rates of breast cancer are seen in patients who are obese, especially in a population of post-menopausal women.

The information provided in this article is intended for your general knowledge only and is not a substitute for professional medical advice or treatment for specific medical conditions. You should not use this information to diagnose or treat a health problem or disease without consulting with a qualified healthcare provider. Please consult your healthcare provider with any questions or concerns you may have regarding your condition.