

Doc Talk - Be Your Own Breast Friend

by Anne O'Malley-Neuhaus, Family Nurse Practitioner

Breast cancer is a form of cancer that occurs in the cells and tissue of the breast. It is the second leading cause of death among women in the United States (www.ABRQ.gov). The National Cancer Institute estimates 207,090 new cases of breast cancer in females and 1,970 new cases of breast cancer in males in the U.S. in 2010. Nearly 40,000 women and 400 men in the U.S. will die from breast cancer this year. Breast cancer does not discriminate and is the most common cancer in women of all combined racial and ethnic groups (CDC, 2010). As of 2008, 2.5 million U.S. women have survived a diagnosis of breast cancer, and the key to their survival is early detection.

Know Your Risk Factors

The most important risk factors for breast cancer are being a woman and getting older. The older we get the greater the risk of developing breast cancer in our lifetime.

Other common risk factors are:

- Having a genetic mutation in the BRCA 1 or 2 breast cancer gene.
- Having a personal history of breast cancer or a mother, sister, daughter or father with breast cancer.
- Never having a child or having a child after the age of 35.
- Starting menstruation at an early age or beginning menopause at a late age.
- Being overweight as an adult or physically inactive.
- Drinking alcohol.
- Using oral contraceptives or hormone replacement therapy for a long time.
- Having been treated with radiation therapy to the breast or chest.

Lowering your risk of developing breast cancer should include exercise, eating a healthy balanced diet, limiting alcohol consumption and if you are currently on hormone replacement therapy, reviewing the risks and benefits with your health care provider.

Your Breast Defense begins with mammograms.

Statistically, women diagnosed in the early stages of breast cancer have better outcomes and mammograms are the best tests for early breast cancer detection. A mammogram is an x-ray of the breast that can detect the signs of breast cancer as early as 3 years before being physically felt (www.CDC.gov/cancer). Yearly mammograms should start at age 40, earlier if there is a family history of breast cancer. Women should talk with their health care provider about when the best time to start their screening based on their personal history.

The best defense is prevention. Do your part to avoid risk factors and be sure to keep up on your mammograms and wellness check-ups. There are federal programs to help provide funding for mammograms, including a program sponsored by Teton Valley Hospital Foundation. Please call 354-6317 extension 181 for more information.

Anne O'Malley-Neuhaus is a Family Nurse Practitioner for Teton Valley Health Care. She serves patients at both Victor and Driggs Health Clinics in addition to providing emergency care for Teton Valley Hospital.

Clinical Breast Exams

A clinical breast exam by a health care provider should be performed at least every 3 years between the ages of 20 - 39 and yearly after the age of 40. The health care provider checks the breast and underarm area for lumps or changes. Often this exam is performed at the time of the annual PAP test.

Breast Self Exam (BSE)

The BSE is an examination that you can perform at home on a monthly basis to check for changes in your breast. It involves looking at and feeling your breasts for any changes. You can have your health care provider show you the steps for the BSE or go to www.Komen.org/bse for instruction.

Early Detection Saves Lives!

According to the National Cancer Institute, 1 in 8 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer during their lifetime. With early detection and diagnosis the breast cancer 5 year survival rate is 98%. Early detection does save lives and the best way to fight breast cancer is with awareness and education. Speak with your health care provider today to schedule your yearly mammogram and clinical breast exam.