

Breast Cancer and Early Detection

Following the American Cancer Society's guidelines for the early detection of breast cancer improves the chances that breast cancer can be diagnosed at an early stage and treated successfully. Therefore, it is important for women to take an active role in early detection. Your physician can provide information for the proper schedule of checkups and symptoms to watch for. This advice will be based on a woman's age, medical history and other factors.

Symptoms ...What to look for

Early breast cancer usually does not cause pain. In fact, when it first develops, breast cancer may cause no symptoms at all. But as the cancer grows, it can cause changes that women should watch for:

- A lump or thickening in or near the breast or in the underarm area.
- A change in the size or shape of the breast.
- A discharge from the nipple.
- A change in the color or feel of the breast, areola or nipple (dimpled, puckered or scaly).

A woman should see her doctor if she notices any of these changes. Most often, they are not cancer, but only a doctor can tell for sure. Breast exams save lives!

There are four important early detection procedures:

- Clinical Breast Exam
- Breast Self-exam
- Mammogram
- Digital Mammogram

Clinical Breast Exam (CBE)

A breast exam by a physician or nurse is typically a part of a routine annual check up for all women. During a CBE, a health professional will carefully inspect and palpate (feel) a woman's breasts and under her arms to check for lumps or other unusual changes while she is lying down. A clinical breast exam is not a substitute for regular mammography for women over 40 years of age.

Self-examination Techniques

By regularly examining her own breasts, a woman is likely to notice any changes that occur. The best time for breast self-examination (BSE) is about a week after your period ends, when your breasts are not tender or swollen. If you are not having regular periods, do BSE on the same day every month.

For monthly breast exams use the fingerpads of your three middle fingers to feel your breast.

Always use your left hand for your right breast and your right hand for your left breast.

Three Methods

Use one of the following methods consistently each time you examine yourself:

1. Circular motion in an oval pattern.
2. Vertical motion in a rectangular pattern.
3. Wedge motion in an oval pattern.

Check for any lumps, hard knots, swelling, dimpling, or thickening. Observe for abnormal change of size, shape, color or discharge.

Standing in front of a mirror, look at both breasts while your arms are at your sides. While raising your arms slowly, look for swelling or changes in nipples or breasts. With your hands on your hips, flex your chest muscles and compare your breasts.

While in the shower, extend your right arm up and examine your right breast. Switch (extend left arm, examine left breast).

While reclined on your bed or floor on your back, place a pillow under your right shoulder so your right breast is flat. Examine your right breast with your right arm under your head. Switch (place pillow under left shoulder and examine left breast).

Mammography

A mammogram is a special x-ray. It is actually two x-rays of each breast, one taken from the top and one from the side. The breast must be compressed between two flat surfaces in order to obtain clear images. While this compression may be uncomfortable (not painful), it lasts for only a few seconds. In many cases, mammograms can detect breast tumors that are too small to be felt or cause symptoms. A mammogram may also show small deposits of calcium in the breast. A cluster of very tiny specks of calcium (called microcalcifications) may be an early sign of cancer.

Mammography should be done only by specially trained medical staff using equipment designed for taking x-rays of the breast. The x-ray images should be read and interpreted by a qualified radiologist. (See information about new digital mammography.)

To learn where you can get a mammogram, talk with your doctor or phone Boone Hospital Center scheduling to make an appointment (573-815-8150) or call the National Cancer Institute's Cancer Information Service (1-800-4-CANCER)

The Dr. Hugh Harris Breast Screening & Diagnostic Center performs mammograms in a comfortable, private setting staffed with highly qualified health professionals.

Mammography screening remains the single most effective method to detect breast cancer in

early stages. However, because no medical test is always 100% accurate, mammography is no exception. Therefore, it is important for women to have their breasts examined regularly by a doctor or nurse and perform BSE's.

Information provided by the National Cancer Institute and NBCAM.