



*Seniors living healthy.*

## October—Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Most women have some close experience with breast cancer, whether personally, through family members or friends. We'd like to help stop that trend. While the focus of this newsletter is typically the healthcare of our elderly patients, we are asking that the close ties of grandmoms, moms and daughters be the focus as we all help one another and hold one another accountable for good healthcare decisions. Grandmoms, encourage your daughters and granddaughters to have a breast exam. Daughters, support your moms and assist them in getting a breast exam. We are all in this together! Following are American Cancer Society recommendations for early breast cancer detection:

Women age 40 and older should have a screening mammogram every year and should continue to do so for as long as they are in good health.

Current evidence supporting mammograms is even stronger than in the past. In particular, recent evidence has confirmed that mammograms offer substantial benefit for women in their 40s. Women can feel confident about the benefits associated with regular mammograms for finding cancer early. However, mammograms also have limitations. A mammogram will miss some cancers, but despite their limitations, they remain a very effective and valuable tool for decreasing suffering and death from breast cancer.

Mammograms for older women should be based on the individual, her health, and other serious illnesses, such as congestive heart failure, end-stage renal disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and moderate-to-severe dementia. Age alone should not be the reason to stop having regular mammograms. As long as a woman is in good health and would be a candidate for treatment, she should continue to be screened with a mammogram.

Every person should know the symptoms and signs of breast cancer, and any time an abnormality is discovered, it should be investigated by a healthcare professional.

Most people who have breast cancer symptoms and signs will initially notice only one or two, and the presence of these symptoms and signs do not automatically mean that you have breast cancer.

Adult women of all ages are encouraged to perform breast self-exams at least once a month. Johns Hopkins Medical center states, "Forty percent of diagnosed breast cancers are detected by women who feel a lump, so establishing a regular breast self-exam is very important."

While mammograms can help you to detect cancer before you can feel a lump, breast self-exams help you to be familiar with how your breasts look and feel so you can alert your healthcare professional if there are any changes.

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## What Can I Do To Reduce My Risk of Breast Cancer?

Although you cannot prevent cancer, some habits that can help reduce your risk are:

- Maintain a healthy weight
- Stay physically active
- Eat fruits and vegetables
- Do not smoke
- Limit alcohol consumption



## How should a breast self-exam be performed?

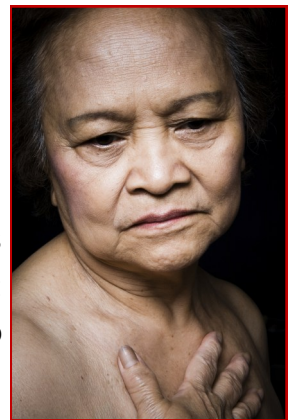
### 1) In the Shower

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.

### 2) In Front of a Mirror

Visually inspect your breasts with your arms at your sides. Next, raise your arms high overhead.

Look for any changes in the contour, any swelling, or dimpling of the skin, or changes in the nipples. Next, rest your palms on your hips and press firmly to flex your chest muscles. Left and right breasts will not exactly match—few women's breasts do, so look for any dimpling, puckering, or changes, particularly on one side.



### 3) 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 covering the entire breast area and armpit.

Use light, medium, and firm pressure. Squeeze the nipple; check for discharge and lumps. Repeat these steps for your left breast.



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## 3-D Mammography

One of the newest options worth considering is tomosynthesis, or 3D mammography. This advanced screening technology is proving to be a game changer in early breast cancer detection because it provides a clearer, more detailed image that allows radiologists to accurately distinguish between cancer masses, calcifications (calcium deposits) and abnormalities of the breast.

While conventional, 2D digital mammograms remain an important tool, they limit the view of the breast to a static, flat image. A 3D mammography shows the breast from several angles and with greater dimension, so you actually can see front to back and side to side. Fifteen images are captured in all, which are then merged using a computer to form the 3D scan.

As a patient, you'll notice few differences in the screening experience. The test is very similar to the one you're accustomed to. You'll be positioned the same, and the time to complete the test is comparable. The only noticeable difference will be the moving parts — the X-ray tube passes in an arc above the breast, capturing images as it goes.

Studies evaluating the effectiveness of 3D mammography revealed some positive trends early on that are being confirmed in its day-to-day use. The advantages over traditional mammography include:

**Earlier detection.** 3D mammography detects approximately 30 percent more cancers than traditional mammography. A majority of those found are small, invasive cancers that are most likely to spread to the lymph nodes.

**Clearer diagnosis.** If something abnormal is revealed on your scan, radiologists can better characterize the type of abnormality, distinguishing between a benign mass and a potential cancer, which requires further testing. They also can determine accurately where in the breast the abnormality is located, which simplifies testing and treatment.

**Fewer false positives.** Because radiologists are better able to distinguish between structural abnormalities of the breast (i.e., overlapping tissue), dense breast tissue and actual masses, there has been a 15 percent reduction in false positives with 3D mammography. Doctors can clearly visualize the breast the first time, which means fewer follow-up tests and, thus, less anxiety for many women.

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### Autumnal Thoughts

Youth is like spring, an over praised season more remarkable for biting winds than genial breezes. Autumn is the mellower season, and what we lose in flowers we more than gain in fruits.

~ Samuel Butler



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