

Breast Cancer Screening and Prevention

Early Detection is the Key to Survival

Breast cancer is the second-leading cause of cancer-related deaths among women in New York State. On average, more than 14,000 women in New York are newly diagnosed with breast cancer each year, and more than 2,800 women die annually from the disease.¹

Regular check-ups and screening tests can find breast cancer at an earlier stage, when treatment works best. The most important action women can take is to have routine breast cancer screenings.

Who Gets Breast Cancer?

All women can get breast cancer. Although the causes of breast cancer are still unknown, there are some factors that may increase women's chances of getting the disease:

- Getting older: Most women are diagnosed over 60 years of age
- Having a first menstrual period at a young age (younger than 12 years)
- Starting menopause at an older age (older than 55 years)
- Never giving birth, or giving birth to a first child after age 30
- Not breastfeeding
- Having had breast cancer, or a close family member (mother, sister, father, daughter) who has had breast cancer, especially early (pre-menopausal) breast cancer
- Having certain gene mutations such as BRCA 1 or BRCA 2
- Being overweight or obese
- Drinking alcohol
- Not getting enough exercise
- Having a history of radiation exposure to the chest
- Taking hormone replacement therapy for an extended period of time.

Even if women have one or more of these risk factors, it does not mean they will get breast cancer. Also, many women who get breast cancer do not have any risk factors. This is why screening is important for all women.

Women with a personal or family history (close family relative) of breast cancer may want to consider genetic counseling to find out if they are at greater risk for getting the disease.

While very rare, it is possible for men to get breast cancer. Symptoms of breast cancer in men are very similar to breast cancer in women.^{2,3,4}

What Are the Symptoms of Breast Cancer?

The most common sign of breast cancer is a new lump or mass. A mass that is painless, hard, and has irregular edges is more likely to be cancerous, but breast cancers can be tender, soft, or rounded. It is important that any new mass, lump, or change in your breast be checked by a health care provider.

Other possible signs of breast cancer that should be checked by a health care provider include:

- Swelling of all or part of a breast (even if no lump is felt)
- Skin irritation or dimpling
- Breast or nipple pain
- Nipple retraction (when the nipple turns inward)
- Redness, scaliness, or thickening of the nipple or breast skin
- Nipple discharge other than breast milk.

Sometimes breast cancer can spread to underarm lymph nodes and cause a lump or swelling there, even before a tumor in the breast tissue is large enough to be felt. You should tell your health care provider about any swelling in the lymph nodes.⁵

New York State Department of Health

Cancer Services Program

Your partner for cancer screening, support and information



What Can Women Do to Reduce Their Risk for Breast Cancer?

Research is being done to find out how to best prevent breast cancer. There are ways to lower your risk, which include:

- Drinking less alcohol
- Getting regular exercise
- Staying a healthy weight
- Breastfeeding (exclusively breast feeding during the first 6 months, and continuing for 12 months or longer)
- Talking to your health care provider about hormone replacement therapy, if you take it
- Getting regular recommended cancer screenings.

What Screening Tests Are Done for Breast Cancer?

Breast cancer screening means checking the breasts for cancer before there are signs or symptoms of sickness. Three main tests are used to screen the breasts for cancer. Talk to your health care provider about which tests are right for you, and when you should have them.

- **Mammogram** A mammogram is a low-dose X-ray of the breast. Health care providers use a mammogram to look for early signs of breast cancer. Women ages 50 to 74 years old should have a screening mammogram every two years. Women ages 40 to 49 years old are encouraged to talk to their health care providers about when and how often they should have screening mammograms. A woman who has a high risk for breast cancer, as determined by a health care provider, may need to begin screening earlier.

Regular mammograms are the best test health care providers have to find breast cancer early. Having regular mammograms can lower the risk of dying from breast cancer. Recommendations for when women should begin screening, and how often women should be screened, may differ among organizations that publish screening recommendations. Women should be aware of their own risk for breast cancer and decide, with a health care provider, when and how to be screened for breast cancer.⁶

- **Clinical breast exam** A clinical breast exam is an examination by a health care provider, who uses his or her hands to feel for lumps or other changes in the breast or underarm (armpit).

- **Breast self-exam** A breast self-exam is when women check their own breasts for lumps, changes in size or shape of the breast, or any other changes in the breasts or underarm.

At this time, guidelines suggest that the best way to find breast cancer is with a mammogram. Clinical breast exams or self-exams alone are not enough to detect breast cancer. Women who choose to have clinical breast exams and to perform breast self-exams should also get regular mammograms.⁷

Where Can Women Go to Get Screened?

Medical clinics, hospitals, or health care providers' offices offer breast cancer screening. Women who want to be screened for breast cancer should talk to their health care providers about when and how often to get screened. Their health care providers can help make appointments for screening.

Who Do I Call for Free or Low-Cost Screening?

The New York State Department of Health Cancer Services Program provides breast cancer screening at no cost to women who:

- Do not have health insurance OR have health insurance that does not cover the cost of these screenings
- Cannot pay for these screenings
- Meet income eligibility requirements
- Meet age requirements
- Live in New York State.

Call **1-866-442-CANCER (2262)** to talk to someone who will connect you to a Cancer Services Program near you. The call is free, and the service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

¹NYS Cancer Registry 2003-2007

²American Cancer Society. www.cancer.org/Cancer/BreastCancer/OverviewGuide/index

³National Cancer Institute. www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/breast

⁴Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/basic_info/risk_factors.htm

⁵American Cancer Society. www.cancer.org/Cancer/BreastCancer/MoreInformation/BreastCancerEarlyDetection/index

⁶United States Preventive Services Task Force. www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/uspstf/uspbrca.htm

⁷Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/basic_info/screening.htm

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