Breast Cancer: Prevention and Early Detection

Let us know how access to this document benefits you
Follow this and additional works at: http://jdc.jefferson.edu/photonovels
Part of the Medicine and Health Sciences Commons

Recommended Citation
http://jdc.jefferson.edu/photonovels/4
Breast Cancer
Prevention and
Early Detection
I was worried, too, so I went to this program about breast cancer. They told us it’s really common. 1 out of every 8 women will get it.

Good morning Carmen, I’ve been alright. I’m just a little worried about my neighbor, because she’s been sick.

Miss Alice?

Yeah, they just found out she has breast cancer. No one in her family ever had breast cancer.

It seems like so many women get it, I’m starting to get worried that I might get it, too.

Hey Denise, how you been?

Wow, I didn’t know that. I know I need to find out about this breast cancer thing, because this is scary. What did they say to do so you won’t get it?
They said there’s no way to prevent breast cancer for sure. There are some things that put you at risk for breast cancer that you can’t change, like your age. As we get older, we’re more likely to get it. Also, breast cancer runs in families. I don’t know what my grandma died of. It might have been cancer. Nobody talked about it then.

Lots of women don’t know if it’s in their family. And, most women who get breast cancer don’t have it in their family. It’s important to try to find out about your family’s medical history. And you should also get regular check-ups. But let’s talk about the things that you can work on to lower your risk of getting breast cancer.

That’s just what they told us! It’s best to eat lots of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. And, you should cut down on red meat, processed food, and fatty foods.

Healthy foods like that might cost more. But it sounds like it would be well worth it.

Yeah, what can I actually do? I bet eating healthy and exercising helps, because that helps everything.
I think so, too, but you need to do a little more than that to lower your risk. Being overweight increases your risk of getting breast cancer. So eating healthy and being active is really important—and walking counts.

I do a lot of walking, just getting around and doing errands. Maybe we could get off the bus a couple of stops early and get in a little more activity that way.

That sounds like something we can really do! Oh, another thing they told us is to watch the alcohol. Even 2 drinks a day can increase your chances of getting breast cancer.

I didn’t know that! I try not to drink because of my diabetes. With that and my bad blood pressure, I guess I’m more likely to get breast cancer.

Actually that’s not true. Just because you have diabetes, high blood pressure, HIV, or another chronic disease, doesn’t mean you’ll get breast cancer. You need to take care of your diabetes and blood pressure. But you don’t need to worry that they increase your chances of getting breast cancer.

But what if I injure my breast? Or breastfeed my children?
Those things don’t cause breast cancer. Underwire bras or wearing the wrong size bra do not increase your risk. Lots of women think that, but pressure or injury to the breasts doesn’t give you cancer. Also, breastfeeding can actually lower your risk of breast cancer!

Having large breasts or breast implants doesn’t put you at higher risk than other women. Cancer can grow in any size breast! And having surgery doesn’t give you cancer or spread it.

That’s right. Doing those things lowers your risk, but you can still get breast cancer. You need to find cancer early when it’s still small. That makes it more likely that the treatment will work. You should check your breasts once a month for changes, and ask your doctor to check your breasts once a year. Also talk with your doctor about when to get a mammogram.

That’s really interesting. I also heard if you have large breasts you can get it. And what about surgery? Do you think that could cause it?

So all I really have to worry about is eating the right food, being active, and not drinking too much alcohol.

Thank you for all the information, Denise! I’m going to talk to my friends about this, and also try to find out if breast cancer runs in my family. Next time I go to the doctor, I am going to ask her all about checking my breasts for cancer.
### Risk Factors You Can't Change

- **Age**: Women over 55 years old or who have gone through the change of life
- **Race**: Caucasian women are more likely to get breast cancer, but African American women are more likely to die from it
- **Family History**: If someone in your family has or had breast cancer, you are at higher risk

### Risk Factors You Can Change

- Unhealthy diet. Eating too much fat in your diet.
- Lack of physical activity
- Being obese or **overweight**
- Having **more than two alcoholic drinks per day**

### Things that are *NOT* risk factors

- Injury to the breasts
- Falls
- Straining/Lifting
- Diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, or HIV
- Bras: underwires or wrong bra size
- Breast implants or breast reductions
- Large breasts

### What do I need to do now?

- Find out about my family history
- Eat healthy. Eat more vegetables and fruit. Reduce fat in my diet
- Get more exercise
- Talk to my doctor about keeping my breasts healthy. Get regular breast check-ups
Denise is getting a mammogram done today. She must be scared.

Yeah, but she said it was time for her to get it.

Hi Carla and Brenda!

Hey! How was it today? What did they say?

Well, I won’t get my results for a few days, but it was fine.

So what happened? Did it hurt?

It was better than I thought it would be. Everyone was very nice. First they give you a robe to put on. Then you go into the exam room. The nurse gently puts your breast between two plates on the machine. The plates squeeze together for a few seconds while the machine takes an x-ray picture of your breast. It hurts a little, but only for a couple seconds. The doctor looks at the x-ray picture for tiny lumps that are too small to feel.
But if you already have cancer growing, wouldn’t the plates pressing on your breast make the cancer spread?

No. That’s not how cancer spreads. Mammograms do not cause or spread cancer. They just look to see if it’s already there. I thought that radiation from the x-ray could cause cancer. The nurse said that a lot of women worry about that. She told me the amount of radiation you get is really, really small, and doesn’t cause cancer.

But you told us you felt fine and your breasts looked normal. So, why did you have to get a mammogram?

At my last check-up, the doctor told me that mammograms can find tiny cancer growths, or tumors, in women who don’t think they’re having any breast problems. You have to get your breasts checked before anything seems wrong, because that means any problems will still be small. The earlier you catch a problem, the easier it is for the doctors to treat it, and the more likely it is that you can beat the cancer.

How do you know when to go in, if nothing is wrong?

All women over 40 are supposed to get a mammogram. Some women may be at higher risk, like if their close family members had breast cancer. Women at higher risk may need to get a mammogram before they are 40, or more often. Your doctor will help you decide how often to get a mammogram and if you are at higher risk.
Getting a mammogram is expensive and I don’t have health insurance. I don’t want to sit through that long process, and take time off work.

There are ways to get free or low cost mammograms. A lot of hospitals provide free or low cost mammograms if you don’t have health insurance or can’t afford one. Getting a mammogram only takes about 20 minutes. If you work, you should ask if they can do the mammogram in the evening, or on weekends. That way you won’t need to miss work. Even if you do have to take a little time off from work, it’s very important. Think about the cost and missed work time if you don’t catch a problem early enough. You want to stay healthy and be there for your family, don’t you?

OK, I guess I am running out of excuses. But I’m scared. What if they find something?

Most of the time it’s nothing to worry about. But they may ask you to get a second mammogram or other tests. Sometimes it’s because the first picture just wasn’t clear. If it is cancer, and it’s found early, the doctors will have more options for treating it. Finding it early can save your life.

I don’t really trust doctors. What if they don’t pick the right treatment?

A lot of research has been done to find out the best ways to treat breast cancer. You and your doctor will discuss the treatment options that are best for you. If you don’t understand something, or have questions, you should ask the doctor to explain. It’s your right to ask as many questions as you want. You want to be sure you understand everything.
Ok, Denise, I’ll think about getting a mammogram. But are there other ways to look for breast cancer?

I’m glad you asked — I wanted to tell you both about that. Yes, there are 2 other ways of checking for breast cancer that every woman should use.

You also should be treated with respect by all the people that work in the office, including the doctor. Breast health is important and personal.

That’s really true. If you feel something isn’t right, let the doctor or nurse know. It’s your right as a patient. You can also ask to have a female doctor if it makes you more comfortable.

Ok, Denise, I’ll think about getting a mammogram. But are there other ways to look for breast cancer?

I know you can check your own breasts. I usually do it every day in the shower.

It’s a good idea to do a Breast Self Exam, but you only need to do it once a month. You should do the exam a couple of days after the end of your period. Or, if you don’t get a period any more you should choose the same time every month, like the first day of the month. Also, it’s best to examine your breasts lying down rather than in the shower. Ask your doctor or nurse how to do it, to make sure you’re doing it the right way.

What are you looking for when you do it? I have lumpy breasts, and I never know if what I’m feeling is normal.
The point of a monthly Breast Self Exam is to learn how your breasts normally feel. That way it will be easier for you to find changes if they happen. Changes to look for are new lumps, swelling, irritated or bumpy skin, nipple discharge, or pain, redness or a nipple that turns inward.

What if you do see one of those things?

If you find changes, you should make a doctor’s appointment right away. Having one of these changes doesn’t mean that you have cancer, but it is important that you get it checked out early.

Also, your doctor or health care provider should examine your breasts regularly. This is called a Clinical Breast Exam. If you’re older than 20, but younger than 40, your doctor should do this as part of your regular exam every 3 years. If you’re older than 40, just like with mammograms, you should get it done every year.

What happens in a Clinical Breast Exam?
It's pretty much like a Breast Self Exam, but done by a trained professional. Your doctor will gently feel your breasts for lumps and look for any changes.

That's a lot of ways to check for breast changes. Breast self exams every month, exams at the doctor, and mammograms…

That's right ladies. So, when are you going to get your mammograms? Real soon?

So you can find and treat breast cancer early!

We’ll call tomorrow and schedule an appointment together!
Breast Health Screening Guidelines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breast Self Exam</th>
<th>Clinical Breast Exam</th>
<th>Mammograms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • For all women over age 20  
• To be done by you every month after your period, or at the same time every month if you no longer get a period  
• Ask your doctor how  
• Look for changes in your breasts | • Every 3 years for women ages 20-39  
• Every year for women over 40  
• Done by your healthcare provider  
• Looks for lumps or changes | • For women over age 40 talk to your doctor about how often to be screened  
• Women under age 40 with a family history should ask their doctor about when to begin testing  
• Use x-rays from a machine to make a picture of the breast  
• Look for lumps or masses |

Which of the following tests have you had in the past year?

___ Breast Self Exam  
___ Clinical Breast Exam  
___ Mammogram

When are you due for each of the following tests? When will you schedule them?

Breast Self Exam due: ___________  Plan to do exam: ___________
Clinical Breast Exam due: ___________  Schedule for: ___________
Mammogram due: ___________  Schedule for: ___________
Mammogram Resources

- Mammograms are generally covered by Medicare, Medicaid and private insurance (at least in part).
- Breast cancer testing is available to women without health insurance for free or at very little cost. Try these local resources:
  - Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation-Philadelphia
    Call to find out where you can get a free or low-cost mammogram in Philadelphia.
    215-238-8900
  - Linda Creed Breast Cancer Foundation
    Call for information on breast cancer screening programs, mammograms, and clinical breast exams.
    215-545-0800 or 1-888-CREED-4-U
  - Philadelphia Department of Public Health
    Must be enrolled in a City Health Care Center to get a mammogram.
    215-685-6786
  - Pennsylvania Department of Health's Healthy Woman Program
    Free mammograms are available for women ages 40-64 who are uninsured or underinsured. Call for an appointment.
    215-985-2610
  - Breast Health Institute
    Call to find out where women over age 40 who do not have insurance or cannot afford mammograms can get one. Many local hospitals take part in this program.
    215-627-4447 or 215-829-1899
  - Bucks County Health Department
    Access to free breast cancer screenings for people who live in Bucks County.
    215-345-3350
  - Living Beyond Breast Cancer
    Access to free mammograms and clinical breast exams.
    610-645-4567
  - Chester County/Montgomery County Health Department
    Access to breast cancer screening for Chester and Montgomery County residents.
    610-278-5117
  - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
    Information available about the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (NBCCEDP) and other general testing information
    1-800-CDC INFO (1-800-232-4636)
    www.cdc.gov/cancer/nbccedp
Other Resources

• Jefferson Easy-To-Use site: JeffersonHospital.org/breastcare
• National Cancer Institute: cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/breast
  or call 1-800-4-cancer (1-800-422-6237)
• BreastCancer.org: www.breastcancer.org
• American Cancer Society: www.cancer.org
  or call 1-800-ACS-2345 (1-866-228-4327)
• Medline Easy-To-Use Tutorial:
  — www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/tutorials/breastcancer/htm/_yes_50_no_0.htm
• HealthyWoman program
  — www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/healthy_women/14172/healthywoman_program_home/557855
  or call 1-800-215-7494
• Breast and Cervical Cancer Prevention and Treatment Program
  — www.dpw.state.pa.us/ServicesPrograms/MedicalAssistance/BreastCancerScreening/003671495.htm
  call 1-800-215-7494 to find the closest HealthyWoman Program provider

Community Participants

Thomas Jefferson University Hospital would like to acknowledge the following community participants for their assistance in the development of this informational booklet.

This is dedicated to all those women who paved the way for breast cancer prevention for women like us.

  Denise Edwards
  Melody Alston
  Yolanda Smith
  Regina Britt
  Gloria Gaines
  Zarah Teachey
  Rosalyn Myers
  Amber Williams
  Tanya McNair
  Mildred Grant
  Matilda Butler
  Julia Galetti
Acknowledgements:

Center for Urban Health
Thomas Jefferson University Hospital

The Breast Care Center
Thomas Jefferson University Hospital

Bridget Peterson, medical student
Jefferson Medical College
Thomas Jefferson University

Design: JeffGraphics, Thomas Jefferson University Hospital

Supported by a grant from the Avon Foundation