

## Breast Cancer

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT EARLY DETECTION AND SELF BREAST EXAMS

Early detection means finding and diagnosing a disease earlier than if you had waited for symptoms to appear. Women whose breast cancer is detected early have a 93% and higher survival rate in the first five years. Early detection and receiving treatment are the most important steps to preventing deaths from breast cancer. The most reliable way to detect breast cancer early is through regular screenings, such as, mammograms, self breast exams, and clinical breast exams.



#### MAMMOGRAMS

A mammogram is an X-ray that allows a specialist to examine breast tissue for suspicious areas. Mammograms can often show a lump in the breast before it can be felt. Lumps can be caused by cancer, fatty cells, or other conditions like cysts.

While women 40 and older should have mammograms every 1 or 2 years, women under 40 who have risk factors for breast cancer should ask their healthcare provider whether mammograms are advisable and how often they should have them.

If your mammogram shows abnormal results, additional tests will be ordered. If the mass appears solid, a radiologist may recommend a biopsy to check for a presence of cancer.

#### SELF BREAST EXAMS

While mammograms can help you detect cancer before you feel a lump, self exams allow you to be familiar with how your breasts look and feel so that you can communicate any changes with your healthcare provider. While doing a self exam, if you do notice a lump, do not panic. Most lumps are not cancerous; however, make an appointment with your provider to be sure.

#### ■ IN THE SHOWER:

With the pads of your three middle fingers, check the entire breast and armpit area pressing down with light, medium, and firm pressure. Check for any lumps, thickening, or any other changes you may notice.

#### ■ IN FRONT OF A MIRROR:

Visually inspect your breasts with your arms at your sides. Then, raise your arms high overhead and look for swelling, dimpling of the skin, or nipple changes. Next, rest your palms to your hips and press firmly to flex your chest muscles. Left and right breasts will not match exactly, so check for changes, particularly on one side.

#### ■ LYING DOWN:

When lying down, the breast tissue spreads out evenly along the chest wall. Place a pillow under your right shoulder and move your right arm behind your head. Using your left hand, move the pads of your fingers around your right breast gently covering the entire breast area and armpit. Use light, medium, and firm pressure. Squeeze the nipple and check for any discharge and lumps. Repeat these steps for the left breast.

#### CLINICAL BREAST EXAMS

A clinical breast exam is performed by a healthcare professional who is trained to recognize different types of abnormalities. They will do a visual check of the skin and tissue and may have you raise your arms, let them hang by your side, or press your hands against your hips. This allows for them to look for differences in the size and shape of your breasts. The skin is also checked for any rash, and/or dimpling.

A manual check is done to look for unusual texture or lumps. Using the pad of their fingers, they may check your entire breast, underarm, and collarbone. A suspicious lump is generally the size of a pea before anyone can feel it in the breast tissue. Your provider will also check your lymph nodes near the breast to see if they are enlarged.

If a lump is discovered, they will note its size, shape, and texture. Any lump discovered will need to be examined with further diagnostic measures.

Lumps that appear soft, smooth, round, and movable are likely to be benign tumors or cysts.

A hard lump that is oddly-shaped and feels firmly attached is more likely to be cancerous but will need further tests to be diagnosed.