

# THE PROACTIVE

Striving to educate our members to be more *ProActive* towards a healthier lifestyle.



As we enter into the month of October and Breast Cancer Awareness month, where we see pink at every turn, from bumper stickers to football cleats, ProAct encourages you to take a moment to learn the signs and symptoms of the disease. Awareness of the disease and its symptoms can lead to early detection and a better chance of survival.

Breast cancer consists of a group of diseases that affect breast tissue due to the formation of a tumor, or an abnormal growth of tissue. Tumors can be classified as benign (noncancerous) or as malignant (cancerous). Malignant tumors are dangerous because the abnormal growth is uncontrolled and can spread to other parts of the body. Both men and women can get breast cancer, but it is much more common in women. Behind certain types of skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common type of cancer among females of all races and ethnicities in the United States. In 2014, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention noted that 236,968 women were diagnosed with breast cancer. The exact cause of breast cancer is unknown, but common risk factors include: an age greater than 55 years, a family history of breast cancer, obesity, consumption of more than one alcoholic drink per day, and becoming pregnant for the first time after 35 years of age. The use of certain hormone therapies can increase breast cancer risk as well. The risk of getting breast cancer increases with age, but also affects younger populations; roughly 11% of all new cases are found in women younger than 45 years of age.

## Screening

It's not possible to prevent the onset of breast cancer, but early detection of the disease can improve outcomes and survival. The best strategy for catching breast cancer in the early stages is to participate in breast cancer screenings on a regular basis. The United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends that women between the ages of 50-74 get a mammogram performed every 2 years. However, women should consider participating in mammogram screenings as early as 40 years of age, especially those with multiple risk factors. A mammogram is a low energy x-ray of the breast tissue that can be used to identify the presence of any tumors and can be performed at most hospitals, clinics, and doctor's offices. Most health insurance plans will cover the costs of a mammogram every one or two years beginning at age 40.

Adopting healthy lifestyle habits can go a long way towards lowering

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breast cancer risk as well. Maintaining a healthy weight, exercising regularly, and limiting alcohol consumption can lower the risk of breast cancer. For mothers, breastfeeding your children can limit your risk too. Breast self-awareness, or being familiar with how your breasts normally look and feel, is important so that you can identify any abnormal lumps or bumps. The National Breast Cancer Foundation recommends that adult women of all ages perform breast self-examinations at least once a month as 40% of diagnosed breast cancers are detected by women who feel a lump during these self-exams. Self-exams can be performed in the shower, in front of a mirror, and while lying down. When in the shower, use the pads of your fingers and move around the breasts in a circular motion to look for any signs of thickening, hardening knots, or lumps. While in front of a mirror, visually inspect your breasts with your arms at your side, and then again with your arms in the air. Lying down, breast tissue spreads evenly along the chest allowing for easier detection of any abnormalities. For more detailed information on breast self-exams, visit the National Breast Cancer Foundation's website at [www.nationalbreastcancer.org](http://www.nationalbreastcancer.org).

## Diagnosis

When breast cancer is suspected, doctors will often use a variety of tests in order to be as accurate as possible. A breast ultrasound involves a machine that uses sound-waves to create a detailed picture of the breast, called a sonogram. A diagnostic mammogram is an x-ray of the breast tissue, similar to mammogram screenings, but provides a much more detailed image. Magnetic Resonance Imaging, or MRI, uses a magnet to create detailed pictures of the interior of the breast. In addition to these imaging tests, doctors will perform a biopsy to determine if the lump is cancerous. A biopsy involves removing tissue or fluid from the breast to be looked at under a microscope and tested further.

If a diagnosis is given, doctors will perform further tests to determine how much the cancer has spread. This process is called staging and is used to determine the intensity of treatment needed to fight the disease. Staging is expressed on a number scale ranging from stage 0 to stage IV. Stage 0 describes the most non-invasive forms of cancer, where there is no evidence that the cancer has spread to any other parts of the body. Stage IV describes the most severe form, in which the cancer has spread to other organs in the body. The consequences of advanced forms of cancer include higher costs for treatment with lower chances of survival.

## Treatment

Breast cancer can be treated in a variety of ways depending on the type of breast cancer and how much it has spread. Surgery is usually the first treatment option, but is dependent upon many different factors including the degree to which the cancer has spread. Surgery involves physically removing the cancer from the body, and most often occurs via lumpectomy or mastectomy. A lumpectomy involves the removal of only the tumor and a small amount of surrounding tissue, whereas a mastectomy involves removing all of the breast tissue. Radiation therapy is a strategy in which high-energy rays are used to kill cancer cells. Most often, this treatment is used to kill cancer cells that may have avoided removal during surgery. This treatment option is limited to the specific areas being treated. Hormonal therapy is an option that targets the removal of the estrogen hormone from the body. In certain breast cancers, estrogen can feed the tumor and allow it to grow even more. By reducing estrogen levels in the body, the treatment eliminates the cancer's source for growth. Chemotherapy treatment involves using medicine that functions to kill cancer cells. However, chemotherapy is often poorly tolerated because it can destroy noncancerous cells that have been functioning normally. Some common side effects include: nausea and vomiting, hair loss, loss of appetite, and pain.

Be *ProActive* with your health and go for your annual screening, because with early detection, the disease can be managed. Early detection will simplify treatment and is essential for increasing survival. If diagnosed, cancer specialists will work with you to pick a therapy that is best suited for you. Often, the best option is a combination of different therapies that work together to eliminate tumors and cancerous cells. Once the cancer is in remission, stay consistent with screenings and continue to make breast self-exams a life-long habit to catch future instances. Wishing you a happy and healthy fall season.

Sincerely,

Your ProAct Team

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