

Breast Cancer Awareness Month

What is Breast Cancer?

Breast cancer is a disease in which malignant (cancer) cells form in the tissues of the breast. It is considered a heterogeneous disease—differing by individual, age group, and even the kinds of cells within the tumors themselves. Obviously no woman wants to receive this diagnosis, but hearing the words “breast cancer” doesn’t always mean an end. It can be the beginning of learning how to fight, getting the facts, and finding hope. Women in the United States get breast cancer more than any other type of cancer except for skin cancer. It is second only to lung cancer as a cause of cancer death in women. Each year it is estimated that nearly 200,000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer and more than 40,000 will die. Approximately 1,700 men will also be diagnosed with breast cancer and 450 will die each year. The evaluation of men with breast masses is similar to that in women, including mammography.

Risk factors for breast cancer include:

- Age: Half of all women diagnosed are over age 65.
- Weight: Being obese or overweight.
- Diet & Lifestyle: Lack of physical activity, a diet high in saturated fat, and alcoholic intake of more than two drinks per day.
- Menstrual & Reproductive History: Early menstruation or late menopause, having your first child at an older age or not having given birth, or taking birth control pills for more than ten years if you are under 35.
- Family & Personal History: A family history of breast cancer—particularly a mother, sister, or a personal history of breast cancer or benign (non-cancer) breast disease.
- Medical & Other Factors: Dense breast tissue (often identified by a mammogram), past radiation therapy to the breast or chest area. A history of hormone treatments—such as estrogen and progesterone, or gene changes—including BRCA1, BRCA2, and others.

Common signs & symptoms of breast cancer include:

- A change in how the breast or nipple feels
You may experience nipple tenderness or notice a lump or thickening in or near the breast or in the underarm area.
- A change in how the breast or nipple looks
This could mean a change in the size or shape of the breast or a nipple that is turned slightly inward. In addition, the skin of the breast, areola or nipple may appear scaly, red or swollen or may have ridges or pitting that resembles the skin of an orange.
- Nipple discharge

An Early Breast Cancer Detection Plan should include:

- Beginning at age 20: Performing breast self-exams and looking for any signs of change.
- Age 20 to 39: Scheduling clinical breast exams every three years.
- By the age of 40: Having a baseline mammogram and annual clinical breast exams.
- Ages 40 to 49: Having a mammogram every one to two years depending on previous findings.
- Ages 50 and older: Having a mammogram every year.
- All Ages:
 - Recording personal exams, mammograms and doctors' appointments on a calendar or in a detailed file.
 - Maintaining a healthy weight, following a low-fat diet, getting regular exercise, quitting smoking, and reducing alcohol consumption.

Material from National Breast Cancer Foundation, Inc. and from Tennessee Breast Center

SMP Home Medical has breast forms and bras by Amoena available to Breast Cancer survivors who have had a Mastectomy procedure. Please call to schedule a confidential fitting in our private fitting room with one of our trained fitters.

Compiled By Lewis Murray, BS, RRT

Lewis is SMP Home Medical's Manager