

Breast cancer prevention: the importance of mammograms ^[1]

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October is breast cancer awareness month. Spread the word and support breast cancer patients and survivors.

Almost everyone knows someone who has had breast cancer or someone who has a family member who has suffered from this disease. Currently, breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in Hispanic women. October is breast cancer awareness month so we take the opportunity to share valuable information to keep you well-informed.

As with other cancers, the risk of breast cancer increases with age. According to CDC statistics, the average age at which a woman is diagnosed with this condition is 61 years and for men diagnosis usually occurs between 60 and 70 years of age. Breast cancer affects not only women; it also affects men. However, the incidence of this type of cancer in men is significantly lower than in women.

Some of the risk factors for developing breast cancer include advanced age, having the first period at an early age, never being pregnant or getting pregnant at a later age, menopause after age 55, being overweight after menopause, the use of oral contraceptives, having a personal or family history of breast cancer, having received radiation therapy before age 30, and ingesting alcohol.

Inheriting certain genetic mutations such as the ones identified in the genes called BRCA1 and BRCA2 also increase the risk of breast and ovarian cancer. Having one or more of these risk factors does not mean that you'll develop this condition, what it means is that the odds of developing breast cancer are higher. Similarly, there are patients who do not exhibit any of these factors and still develop the condition. Learning this information and sharing it is crucial in raising awareness about breast cancer and the importance of getting mammograms regularly.

Put simply, breast cancer is caused by an uncontrolled growth of cells that make up the tissue of the breast. Some of the signs that may occur include: a new lump in the breast or underarm (near the armpit area), breast swelling, formation of "dimples" in the breast, redness in the breast area, nipple retraction, nipple discharge (excluding milk), pain in the breast area, or a change in shape or size of this.

Although these may be signs of breast cancer, it is important to keep in mind that other noncancerous conditions can present also some of these symptoms. It's important to remember that what may be normal for you, may not be for someone else. Additionally, through a woman's life, appearance and texture of the breasts change with her period and is also affected by having children, and weight-gain or loss.



What can we do to reduce the risk of breast cancer? Some options are to maintain a healthy weight, exercising, not drinking alcohol or limiting its consumption, avoiding exposure to agents that can cause cancer, breastfeeding when you have children, and limiting your exposure to radiation.

One way to identify this type of cancer is by performing the test known as a mammography screening. A mammogram is a type of X-ray that can detect small tumors that can not be felt. Mammograms should be done every 1-2 years for women aged 40-49 years and every 2 years for women 50-74 years. The age at which you should begin and the frequency at which they should be performed may vary depending on the specific risk factors of each woman. Therefore, consult with your doctor about when you should start getting mammograms.

Doing a mammography screening often does not prevent breast cancer, but it does help to identify the condition at an early stage increasing the chances of a successful treatment. The earlier a cancerous lesion is identified, the greater the likelihood that it has not spread beyond the breast. Therefore, it can be treated with a less invasive surgery that gives better results.

It is very important that we do not just prevent this type of cancer, it's also crucial that we provide support to patients and cancer survivors.

References

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