



October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Be Informed, Not Afraid

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October is [breast cancer awareness month](#), and the goal is to get the word out to women on how to educate and protect themselves. Those with “dangerous boobs” i.e. dense breasts, as well as anyone else owning a pair, need to sit up and take notice. The topic of breast cancer can elicit such dread that rather than acting, we deny and avoid instead.

Now is the time to hit the re-boot button and review your checklist. Are there new advances you haven’t heard about? Are you doing all you should based on your health history? What daily routines might improve your odds of not developing the disease?

Early detection is still the best way to beat it, which is why screening is so important.

Screening types

Physical Exam

You know your body better than anyone. In addition to your annual OB/GYN visit, do a self - exam once a month so that you notice any changes.

Mammogram

The go-to test is still a mammogram (X-ray of the breasts). The advisable frequency is a baseline between the ages of 35-40, then once a year after age 40. While this has been hotly debated, it is the current standard recommended by the American Cancer Society.

Ultrasound

This painless, hand-held scanning device converts electrical current into sound waves - and works well in viewing soft tissue. It can determine whether a lump seen on X-Ray is solid or filled with fluid.

AWBUS Ultrasound

The Automated Whole Breast Ultrasound is a relatively new technique available for women with implants or dense tissue. Unlike hand-held ultrasound devices, the AWBUS uses an articulating computerized arm to provide whole breast coverage. This allows detection of very small tumors ranging from 3-5 mm.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)

An MRI machine uses magnetization and radio frequency to provide cross-sectional images inside tissue. These scans are often added to routine mammography to find small tumors or further define anything suspicious in women who are at a higher risk for cancer.

Positron-Emission Tomography (PET scan)

PET scans are like an X-ray, but shows cell activity by detecting the rates at which a cell consumes sugar. Cancer cells consume at a faster rate. This scan is very accurate at diagnosing whether a tumor is cancerous.

BRCA1 and BRCA2 genetic testing

Having these genes can raise risk factor up to 50%. A simple blood test can determine if you carry these genes.

Lifestyle changes can reduce your risk

Remember to be proactive even after your screening. There are simple things every woman can do daily to lower her risk. The American Institute for Cancer Research outlines three overarching tactics: eat nutrient-dense plant foods, be physically active every day, and aim for a healthy weight.

In a nutshell:

- Limit alcohol/quit smoking
- Don't smoke
- Control your weight
- Exercise

- Get enough sleep
- Limit duration of hormone therapy
- Manage stress
- Avoid exposure to radiation and environmental pollution as possible
- Eat a healthy diet (more plants, and cut back on sugar and animal fats).

Vitamins/Nutritional Supplements

Eastern and Western medicine often disagree as to the benefits of vitamins and supplements, but most concur that if it won't hurt you, there's no reason not to try them. Consult a qualified health care provider before taking supplements as they may interact with other medications.

Generally, anti-oxidants are believed to have properties that inhibit cancer-causing free radicals. Some of the most popular on the market that have some research behind them include:

- DIM
- Green and black tea
- Iodine Supplementation
- Turmeric, Vitamin D and Flaxseed
- Research your own supplements

[Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center](#) also provides a search tool where you can enter the name of the supplement in question and get information from their database.

Most of us know someone who has battled breast cancer, if not having faced it ourselves. So, this October remember to spread the word. Attend an event. Donate to a research organization. And most importantly, take care of yourself and your loved ones.

