

THE POWER OF EARLY DETECTION: UNDERSTANDING BREAST CANCER AWARENESS

2025

Breast Cancer Awareness promotes early detection and support to save lives.

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month - a time to pause, reflect, and renew our commitment to education and early detection. Breast cancer remains the second most common cancer among women in the United States, but advances in treatment and awareness have dramatically improved outcomes. The most powerful tool we have in this fight is early detection.

Why Early Detection is Key

When breast cancer is found early—while it is small and before it has spread—the five-year survival rate is significantly higher. Early detection gives patients the greatest range of treatment options and the best chance for a successful recovery. This isn't just about one day in October- it's about developing lifelong habits of vigilance and proactive health screening.

1. Know Your Risk Factors

While having a risk factor doesn't mean you will get breast cancer, it's important to be aware of them. Major risk factors include:

- Age: Risk increases as you get older.
- Family History: Having a mother, sister, or daughter who has had breast cancer.
- Genetics: Inherited mutations in genes like BRCA1 and BRCA2.
- Lifestyle Factors: Excessive alcohol consumption, lack of physical activity, and obesity.

If you have concerns about your risk, talk to your primary care physician about genetic testing or enhanced screening schedules.

2. Follow Screening Guidelines

Regular screening is the gold standard for catching cancer early. Discuss these recommendations with your doctor:

- Clinical Breast Exam: An exam performed by a health professional, typically during your annual physical.
- Mammograms: For most women with an average risk, annual mammograms are recommended starting at age 40 or 45, though specific timing can vary.
- Self-Exams (Breast Self-Awareness): Regular self-checks help individuals become familiar with their bodies and notice changes more easily. Report any changes immediately to your doctor.

3. What to Look and Feel For

Changes aren't always painful. If you notice any of these symptoms, schedule an appointment right away:

- A lump, thickening, or swelling in or near the breast or underarm area.
- A change in the size or shape of the breast.
- Dimpling or puckering of the skin.
- A nipple that turns inward (inversion).
- Redness, scaling, or flaking of the nipple or breast skin.
- Nipple discharge other than breast milk.

Breast Cancer Awareness Month is a powerful reminder that our best defense is knowledge, vigilance, and action. By staying informed and utilizing the preventive care covered by your benefits plan, you are taking the most important step in protecting your health.