

Make Breast Health A Year-Round Concern

(NAPSA)—Just as relevant today as it was more than 20 years ago when the organization was founded, National Breast Cancer Awareness Month (NBCAM) wants women of all ages to know that breast health is a year-round concern.

Early detection as well as educating yourself about breast cancer can be two of the best possible “medicines” toward fighting the disease. And if you or someone you know has survived breast cancer, it is just as important to know your risk of recurrence, or the return of the disease. Breast cancer is the second most common cancer among women, and breast cancer recurrence is possible even in women who have had a mastectomy (or breast removal).

Promote breast health using key dates

Since the American Cancer Society recommends that women begin to conduct monthly self-breast examinations at age 20, mark a date on your calendar each month for a self-exam. Women in their 20's and 30's should also have a clinical breast exam as part of their regular exam from a health expert. At age 40, women should begin annual mammographies, or as recommended by your physician, and yearly clinical breast exams by a health expert. These may be scheduled around a special date such as your birthday or an anniversary. Women under 40 with a family history of breast cancer should consult their health care provider, who may stress the importance of appropriate screening and early detection and when to begin mammography.

Make things easy with a routine shower check

As a regular activity, when you're in the shower, check your breasts for any changes. Some of the most common signs of breast cancer could be the appearance of a lump or a change in breast size or shape. Look for changes in the color of your breast as well as skin changes (scaly or itchy areas, dimpling, and puckering) or a new pain in one spot. Any change from what is normal should be reported to your doctor.

Keep in mind that while some people experience clear physical symptoms or warning signs of breast cancer, others with breast cancer do not. That is why screening is so important. For more information on self-breast examination

To help prevent breast cancer, women should:

- Conduct monthly self-breast examinations starting at age 20.
- Get mammograms regularly, preferably once a year, starting at age 40.
- Ask a doctor whether more frequent screenings are necessary based on family history.

Log on to www.NBCAM.org for additional information about breast cancer.



and downloadable breast self-examination shower cards, visit the Susan G. Komen for the Cure Web site at www.komen.org or call 1-800-462-9273.

Guard against recurrence

Even women who have already battled breast cancer are at risk for a recurrence. A recent survey by a world-renowned polling institute revealed that 30 percent of women diagnosed with breast cancer don't believe there is anything they can do to lessen the likelihood of a breast cancer recurrence. But the truth is there are things you can do to reduce your risk of recurrence. Talk with your doctor to understand what treatment regimen is best for you.

According to the American Cancer Society, about 77 percent of breast cancer diagnoses occur in women age 50 and older. Women with early breast cancer are at their greatest risk of disease recurrence during the first five years after diagnosis. Therefore, the treatment received during these first five years is most important in preventing a recurrence.

As scientists continue to search for a cure, their advancements in creating treatments such as aromatase inhibitors have been shown to lower the risk of having the cancer come back and lower the risk of new breast cancers for many women. Exact treatment for breast cancer varies from woman to woman, so discuss with your doctor which options would be effective in treating your cancer.

Become more savvy about breast cancer

Finally, become better educated about breast cancer. Although October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, NBCAM wants to remind everyone that breast cancer awareness is important all year long. For more in-depth information on breast cancer, visit the newly redesigned National Breast Cancer Awareness Month Web site at www.NBCAM.org.