



CANCER AWARENESS: BREAST CANCER AND BEYOND

October is Breast Cancer Awareness month. It is the most common cancer with lung, prostate, and skin cancers following close behind. The risk of death from cancer has been dropping by about 2% each year, in part because of new treatments and early detection.¹

Read up on ways to reduce your risk of cancer and potential steps to take if you or a loved one receive a diagnosis.

CANCER PREVENTION

Cancer is caused by genetic mutations that change the way cells grow. There isn't always one cause, but there are many known risk factors for developing cancer, like family history, tobacco use, alcohol use, and other lifestyle choices.

Make healthy choices like not smoking, and drinking only in moderation. Eat a healthy diet, exercise regularly, and be sure to wear sunscreen! Be aware of your risk level and ask your doctor about immunizations and screening exams that are best for you.²

EARLY DETECTION

Different cancers have different symptoms, but commonly include lumps, weight or skin changes, and unexplained bleeding or bruising. If you have any persistent symptoms, talk to your doctor and ask for cancer screening tests. If you are high risk, it's worth starting the conversation sooner rather than later when symptoms appear.³

Not sure how to kick the discussion off? Try these suggestions:⁴

- What cancer screening tests are recommended for someone my age?
- How often should I get the screening tests?
- Where can I go to get screened?
- How do I schedule my screening tests?
- Will my screening tests (or other associated costs) be covered by my health insurance?
- What will the screening test cost if they are not covered by insurance?

BREAST CANCER: WHAT TO WATCH FOR⁵

Redness, flaky skin, or pain in the breast or nipple? It could be a red flag, along with:

Breast Changes

- New lump in the breast or armpit
- Shape or size
- Thickening/swelling
- Irritation/dimpling

Nipple changes

- Pulling
- Odd discharge, like blood

AFTER DIAGNOSIS⁶

No one wants a cancer diagnosis, but it's helpful to know what to expect if it happens. It's always important for patients and loved ones to express their feelings, take care of themselves, and focus on what they can control to cope. Learn more about the diagnosis and talk to the care team to help navigate any tough emotions.

Treatment options depend on the specific type and stage of the cancer, but may include surgery and chemotherapy. Clinical trials might also offer other options. Be sure to discuss each treatment and its side effects with the care team. Ultimately, the course of treatment is up to the patient. And remember—never be afraid to get a second opinion.

WHAT QUESTIONS WILL THE DOCTOR ASK?⁶

- When did you first begin experiencing symptoms?
- Have your symptoms been continuous or occasional?
- How severe are your symptoms?
- What, if anything, seems to improve or worsen your symptoms?
- Has anyone in your family had cancer?
- Have you ever been exposed to chemicals at home or at work?
- Do you smoke or use tobacco?
- Have you ever been diagnosed with a hepatitis infection or a human papillomavirus infection?

Early detection is an important factor in treating cancer, so give you and your loved ones a better chance at fighting the disease by staying aware and knowing potential steps to take. Cancer can be emotionally difficult, but with some preparation and engagement with your cancer care team, the fight can be a little less treacherous.

This article is for informational purposes only.

¹"Risk of Dying from Cancer Continues to Drop at an Accelerated Pace." *American Cancer Society*, 2022.

²"Cancer: Overview." *Mayo Clinic*, 2022.

³"Promoting Early Detection and Treatment of Cancer." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 2021.

⁴"Cancer Screening 101." *American Cancer Society*, 2021.

⁵"What Are the Symptoms of Breast Cancer?" *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 2022.

⁶"Cancer: Diagnosis." *Mayo Clinic*, 2022.