Let’s be well

Know the Facts: Breast Cancer Awareness

Breast exams are one of the best ways to detect cancer early. Clinical exams, breast self-exams and mammograms should be performed regularly to determine if there are changes in breast tissue, indicating breast cancer or other benign or potentially harmful conditions.

Clinical exams and mammograms
The American Cancer Society recommends clinical breast exams every three years for women between 20 and 40, and annually for women 40 and older. Starting at age 45, healthy women should have yearly mammograms. While breast cancer is rare for men, they should also be aware if there are changes to their breast tissue.

Performing self-exams
In between clinical exams and mammograms, women should complete breast self exams to become familiar with the look and feel of their breasts when healthy, so that changes can be detected as early as possible. Here is how to complete a self exam:

1. Lie down and place one arm behind your head.

2. Use the pads of your middle three fingers on the opposite hand to check your breast tissue in overlapping, dime-sized circular motions.

3. Use an up-and-down pattern starting at your underarm and moving all the way to the middle of your breastbone to feel for changes.

4. Standing with your hands on your hips, look in a mirror for changes in size, shape, contour or coloring of your breasts.

Breast tissue changes
Contact your doctor if you notice any of the following changes to your breast or nipple tissue:
• Lumps
• Dimpling, red or scaly skin
• Nipple discharge or pain

It is normal for breast tissue to change during menstrual cycles, pregnancy, menopause or while taking birth control pills or other hormone therapy. However, if you notice changes at other times in your life, contact your health care provider immediately.

Use this diagram to understand how to perform a thorough self-exam:
breastcancer.org/symptoms/testing

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