Using Knowledge in the Fight Against Breast Cancer

Here’s something serious to ponder: 12.4% of women in the U.S. will be diagnosed with breast cancer at some point during their lifetime.

But that sobering statistic doesn’t tell the whole story of breast cancer. Rates for new breast cancer cases have been stable over the last 10 years. The five-year survival rate is at nearly 90%, and death rates have been falling an average 1.8% each year from 2005-2014 (the most recent data available).

Keeping track of the number of new cases, deaths, and survival over time (these are called trends) helps scientists understand whether progress is truly being made in the fight against breast cancer, and where additional research is needed, such as new screening techniques and treatment options.

The Continuing Role of the Mammogram in Saving Lives

Annual mammograms can detect cancer early, when it is most treatable. In fact, mammograms show changes in the breast up to two years before a patient or physician can feel them with a physical exam. Mammograms can also prevent the need for extensive treatment for advanced cancers and improve chances of conserving the breast if surgery is required. Current guidelines from the American College of Radiology and the American College of Radiology recommend that women receive annual mammograms starting at age 40 even if they have no symptoms or a family history of breast cancer.

For every 1,000 women who have a screening mammogram:
- 100 are recalled to get additional mammography or ultrasound images
- 20 are recommended for a needle biopsy
- 5 are diagnosed with breast cancer

Relative survival statistics compare the survival of patients diagnosed with cancer with the survival of people in the general population who are the same age, race, and gender, and who have not been diagnosed with cancer.

Because survival statistics are based on large groups of people, they cannot be used to predict exactly what will happen to an individual patient. No two patients are alike, and treatment and responses to treatment can vary greatly. What’s your best bet? Early detection.

Source: American College of Radiology; American Cancer Society
What You Should Know About Breast Cancer Symptoms

Have you noticed changes in your breasts recently? Every person should know the symptoms and signs of breast cancer. Cancer experts recommend that any change should be investigated by a healthcare professional. Doing so can save your life.

Most people who have breast cancer symptoms and signs will initially notice only one or two (see the list, below). The presence of symptoms and signs do not automatically mean that you have breast cancer, only that you need to investigate further.

By performing monthly breast self-exams, you will be able to more easily identify any changes. Be sure to talk to your doctor if you notice anything unusual. Symptoms to watch for:

- Nipple tenderness or a lump or thickening in or near the breast or underarm area.
- A change in the skin texture or an enlargement of pores in the skin of the breast, similar to an orange peel’s texture.
- A lump in the breast. All lumps should be investigated by a healthcare professional, but not all lumps are cancerous.
- Any unexplained change in the size or shape of the breast.
- Dimpling anywhere on the breast.
- Unexplained swelling of the breast, especially if on one side.
- Shrinkage of the breast, especially if on one side only.
- A milky discharge that is present when a woman is not breastfeeding should be checked by her doctor, although it is not linked with breast cancer.
- Recent asymmetry of the breasts. It is common for women to have one breast that is slightly larger than the other. But if a change in size is recent, it should be checked.
- A nipple that is turned slightly inward or inverted.
- Skin of the breast, areola, or nipple that becomes scaly, red, or swollen or may have ridges or pitting like an orange peel.

Tests for Detecting Breast Cancer

Different tests can be used to look for and diagnose breast cancer:

**Mammogram:** For many years, mammogram images were recorded on film. But newer digital mammograms can store and analyze the test’s images using a computer. Researchers determined that digital mammograms did a better job with detection for women under age 50, those with dense breasts, and women who haven’t completed menopause, or have menopausal less than a year.

The doctor reading either a film or digital mammogram image will look for breast changes, such as small white spots called calcifications, lumps or tumors called masses, and other suspicious areas.

**Breast Ultrasound:** Ultrasound is useful for looking at some breast changes, such as those that can be felt but not seen on a mammogram, or changes in women with dense breast tissue. Ultrasound can be used to tell the difference between fluid-filled cysts and solid masses. Good news: if a lump is found to be a cyst, it’s not cancer.

Ultrasound can be used to help guide a biopsy needle into an area of change so that cells can be removed and tested for cancer. It can also be used to look for and guide a biopsy needle into swollen lymph nodes under the arm.

**Breast MRI:** A breast MRI is mainly used for women who have been diagnosed with breast cancer, to help measure the size of the cancer, look for other tumors in the breast, and to check for tumors in the opposite breast.

For certain women at high risk for breast cancer, a screening MRI is recommended along with a yearly mammogram. MRI is not recommended as a screening tool by itself because it can miss some cancers that a mammogram would find.

Sources: American Cancer Society; webmd.com
HEALTH TEST

How Much Do You Know About Breast Cancer?

1. Mammograms have helped reduce breast cancer deaths in the United States.
   - True   - False

2. Not much has changed in mammography over the past several decades.
   - True   - False

3. Men can get breast cancer, too.
   - True   - False

4. Breast cancer usually doesn’t affect younger women.
   - True   - False

HEALTHY BITES

Hearty Apple Oatmeal Muffins

Buy apples while they’re in season and on sale. Make batches of these muffins to put in the freezer for later. Substitute whole wheat flour to make your muffins heartier and more nutritious.

INGREDIENTS

- 1/2 cup milk, non-fat
- 1/3 cup applesauce
- 1/2 cup flour, all-purpose
- 1/2 cup quick-cooking oats (uncooked)
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1/2 Tbsp. baking powder
- 1/2 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1 apple (tart, cored and chopped)

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 400°F.
2. Place 6 cupcake holders in baking tin.
3. In a mixing bowl, add milk and applesauce. Stir until blended.
4. Stir in flour, oats, sugar, baking powder, and cinnamon. Mix until moistened (do not over mix).
5. Gently stir in the chopped apples.
6. Spoon into cupcake holders.
7. Bake for 15-20 minutes or until an inserted toothpick comes out clean.
8. Cool in pan 5 minutes before serving

Optional toppings include raisins and nuts.

Answers to the Health Test!

1. True. Since 1990, mammography has helped reduce breast cancer deaths in the U.S. by nearly 40%.
2. False. Digital mammograms are coming into wider use. Researchers determined that digital mammograms are doing a better job with breast cancer detection for women under age 50, those with dense breasts, and women who haven’t completed menopause, or have menopausal less than a year. Ask your healthcare provider if a digital mammogram is right for you.
3. True. Breast cancer is about 100 times less common among men than among women. For men, the lifetime risk of getting breast cancer is about 1 in 1,000.
4. True. The risk of breast cancer is low for younger women. For women 40 or younger, the chance of developing breast over the next 10 years is 2%. Factors that increase cancer risk in older women (such as drinking alcohol) also increase risk in younger women.

Sources: American Cancer Society; American College of Radiology; National Cancer Institute; Susan B. Koman