

African-Americans and Breast Cancer

WHAT IS BREAST CANCER?

Breast cancer is the second most common cancer in women, and is found in one in eight women in the United States. It is a group of diseases in which cells in the tissues of the breast become abnormal and divide without order or control. These malignant cells form too much tissue and become a tumor. The tumor can grow into nearby tissue or cells break away and enter the bloodstream or lymphatic system eventually affecting other organs. Twice as many African-American women who have breast cancer die from it as white women, although fewer African-American women get the disease. Since 1989, deaths from breast cancer are down 5 percent for all women. However, the death rate remains disproportionately high for African-American women. That may be because we are less likely to get mammograms because we either think we won't get breast cancer or don't have access to care. Encourage your sisters, mothers, daughters, aunts and grandmothers to get screened regularly. Too many African-American women die needlessly from breast cancer who might have lived with early diagnosis and treatment.

RISK FACTORS

- Age
- Family History
- Lack of physical activity
- Overweight/Obesity
- Drinking alcohol (more than one drink a day)
- Starting your menstrual period at a young age
- Starting menopause at a later age
- Being older at the birth of your first child
- Never giving birth
- Not breastfeeding
- Use of birth control pills, also called oral contraceptives
- Long-term use of hormone replacement therapy (estrogen and progesterone combined)

PREVENTION

- Exercise regularly
- Control weight
- Know your family history of breast cancer
- Find out the risks and benefits of hormone replacement therapy
- Limit the amount of alcohol you drink
- Get screened regularly and early

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- New lump in the breast or underarm (armpit)
- Thickening or swelling of part of the breast
- Irritation or dimpling of breast skin
- Redness or flaky skin in the nipple area or the breast
- Pulling in of the nipple or pain in the nipple area
- Nipple discharge other than breast milk, including blood
- Any change in the size or the shape of the breast
- Pain in any area of the breast

DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

Breast self-exam. If you are a woman over the age of 18, do a breast self-exam every month. A breast self-exam is when you check your own breasts for lumps, changes in size or shape of the breast, or any other changes in the breasts or underarm (armpit).

Clinical breast exam. A clinical breast exam is an examination by a doctor or nurse, who uses his or her hands to feel for lumps or other changes.

Mammogram. A mammogram is an X-ray of the breast. Mammograms are the best method to detect breast cancer early when it is easier to treat and before it is big enough to feel or cause symptoms. Having regular mammograms can lower the risk of dying from breast cancer. If you are age 40 years or older, be sure to have a screening mammogram every one to two years.

Breast ultrasound. A machine uses sound waves to make detailed pictures, called sonograms, of areas inside the breast.

- Biopsy. This is a test that removes tissue or fluid from the breast to be looked at under a microscope and do more testing. There are different kinds of biopsies (for example, fine-needle aspiration, core biopsy, or open biopsy).
- Chemotherapy. Using special medicines, or drugs to shrink or kill the cancer. The drugs can be pills you take or medicines given through an intravenous (IV) tube, or, sometimes, both.
- Radiation. The use of high-energy rays (similar to X-rays) to kill the cancer cells. The rays are aimed at the part of the body where the cancer is located.

RESOURCES

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/

National Cancer Institute: www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/breast/

American Cancer Society: www.cancer.org

Sisters Network, Inc.: www.sistersnetworkinc.org

The Community Guide: www.thecommunityguide.org/cancer/screening/

Cancer Control P.L.A.N.E.T.: http://cancercontrolplanet.cancer.gov/breast_cancer.html

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Contact the African-American Community Health Advisory Committee at gbrown@aachac.org or call (650) 696-4378.