



Mautner Project Fact Sheet on Breast Cancer

According to the American Cancer Society, an estimated 209,000 Americans will be diagnosed with breast cancer in 2010, and over 40,000 people will die from it. Being familiar with how your own breasts feel will help you notice any unusual changes.

Breast cancer is the uncontrolled growth of abnormal breast cells. There are two types of breast cancer: non-invasive, which does not spread to surrounding tissues, and invasive, which is more serious and can spread to other parts of the body. While both men and women can get breast cancer, it is one of the most common kinds of cancer in women, and is the most common cancer in African American women. It is the second most common cause of cancer death in women after lung cancer.

Risk Factors:

- **Age:** The risk of developing breast cancer increases as a woman ages. It is important to note, however, that African American women are at risk of developing breast cancer at an earlier age than Caucasian women.
- **Race:** Although white women are more likely to develop breast cancer, black women are more likely to die from the disease. This is in part due to developing the disease earlier, as well as having more aggressive types of breast cancer.
- **Personal and Family History:** Previous history of breast cancer, a history of endometrial or ovarian cancer, as well as a family history of breast cancer all increase risk of getting breast cancer.
- **Reproductive History and Pregnancy:** An early start of menses (before 12 years), late menopause (after 53 years), and women who have their first pregnancy after age 30 or no pregnancy at all have a higher risk of breast cancer. Many women who partner with women may have a higher risk for cancer because they are more likely to have children later (35 years and older) and/or are less likely to bear children.
- **Lifestyle Factors:** Obesity, lack of exercise, smoking, and alcohol use (more than one alcoholic drink per day) all contribute to an increase in risk of breast cancer. African American lesbians and women who partner with women are more likely to be obese than white women, and are therefore more at risk for breast cancer.
- **Other Factors:** Environmental factors and some medications may affect risk. Some birth control pills can increase risk of breast cancer, as well as taking certain forms of hormone replacement therapy over a long period of time.

Symptoms:

Breast cancer symptoms vary widely — from lumps to swelling to skin changes — and many breast cancers have no obvious symptoms at all. Symptoms that are similar to those of breast cancer may be the result of non-cancerous conditions like an infection or a cyst.

Prevention: Practice Breast Self-Awareness

Mautner Project has adapted Susan G. Komen's recommendation called "Breast Self-Awareness" for better breast health. It is a four step process:

1. Know your risk

The first step to better breast health is knowing your risk and talking about it.

Fill out a self breast assessment sheet, available from

http://www.mautnerproject.org/printables/self_breast_assessment_form.pdf and bring it in with you the next time you see your regular health provider. Next, talk to your family to learn about your family health history. Sometimes it can be hard for LGBT folks to talk to our families, but knowing about our family health histories can help us to determine appropriate screening recommendations and other very important health decisions for the future. If you feel safe enough to talk to your family, please do so for your health! And finally, talk to your doctor about your personal risk of breast cancer and come prepared with your self-breast risk assessment sheet and a summary of the history of cancer in your family.

In summary:

- Talk to your family to learn about your family health history.
- Talk to your doctor about your personal risk of breast cancer

2. Get screened

Regular screening is critical to breast health. One mammogram or clinical breast exam is not enough. Celebrate your life by going every year! Many people go during their birthday month.

Definition: Mammography - A mammogram is a special type of x-ray designed to find abnormalities (a mass or growth that might be cancerous) in your breasts. However, not all abnormalities are found during a mammogram and not all abnormalities found are cancerous. You may have heard from others that having a mammogram hurts – but having breast cancer hurts more. A mammogram does involve gently squishing your breasts between two plates for just a few seconds. These few seconds of discomfort are well worth it – they could save your life!

Definition: Clinical Breast Exam (CBE) - Your health care provider will do a clinical breast examination every three years for women in their 20's and 30's, and annually for women 40 and older. During this examination your provider will feel and look at your breasts and surrounding chest area. They will also examine your underarm and the area around your neck to see if there are any lumps that might be connected to a problem in your breast. If your doctor does not feel under your arms or around your neck you should ask them to examine those areas.

In summary:

- Ask your doctor which screening tests are right for you and for more information about

whether you are at a higher risk

- Have a mammogram every year starting at age 40 if you are at average risk
- Have a clinical breast exam at least every 3 years starting at age 20, and every year starting at age 40

If you cannot afford a clinical breast exam or mammogram because you do not have enough insurance, have no insurance, or have limited fiscal resources, there are many places that offer free or low cost screening options. For more information about free and/or low-cost mammograms and CBEs in the DC Metropolitan area, please visit our [Tools for Caring](#) webpage. To find free and/or low-cost mammograms outside of DC, give us a call at Mautner Project or send an email to info@mautnerproject.org.

3. Know what is normal for you

Many people get very intimidated when doing a breast self exam (BSE), but this important monthly self-examination can provide you with important information about your body. Doing BSEs regularly will make you more familiar with what your breasts look and feel like, which will help you to identify any changes. All breasts are lumpy - don't do a BSE looking for lumps! Do your BSE to look for changes. So touch yourself! Here's how:

Step 1: Look for changes

In front of the mirror:

- Hold your arms at your side
- Hold your arms over your head
- Press your hands on your hips and tighten your chest muscles
- Bend forward with your hands on your hips

Step 2: Feel for changes

Lying down:

- Lie down on your back with a pillow under your right shoulder
- Use the pads of the three middle fingers on your left hand to check your right breast
- Press using light, medium and firm pressure in a circle without lifting your fingers off the skin
- Follow an up and down pattern
- Feel for changes in your breast, above and below your collarbone and in your armpit
- Repeat on your left breast using your right hand

Step 2 can be repeated while bathing or showering using soapy hands.

See your health care provider right away if you notice any of these breast changes:

- Lump, hard knot or thickening inside the breast
- Changes in a lump
- Swelling, warmth, redness or darkening of the breast
- Change in the size or shape of the breast
- Dimpling or puckering of the skin
- Itchy, scaly sore or rash on the nipple
- Pull in of your nipple or other parts
- Nipple discharge that starts suddenly
- New pain in one spot that does not go away

4. Make healthy lifestyle choices

Going in for regular screening is only half the battle. Part of your breast cancer risk has to do with your long-term exposure to female hormones (estrogen and progesterone). So making healthy lifestyle choices like maintaining a healthy weight (the more of you there is, the more exposure to female hormones you will experience), for women who plan on becoming pregnant choosing to breast feed your child(ren), and limiting your postmenopausal hormone use (such as hormone replacement therapy or HRT) help reduce your risk of breast cancer. You should also limit your alcohol intake, as the link between alcohol and breast cancer has become increasingly clear in recent years - research has shown that consuming only two drinks a day increases your risk of breast cancer by more than 20% compared with women who don't drink at all.

In summary:

- Maintain a healthy weight
- Add exercise into your routine (if you live in the DC metro area and would like some support, please visit our [M.O.V.E. webpage](#))
- Limit alcohol intake
- Limit postmenopausal hormone use
- Breastfeed, if you can

Treatment: The treatment that you receive may depend on the stage of breast cancer that you are in. Different treatment options include:

- Lumpectomy: Removing the lump found in or around the breast.
- Mastectomy: Removing all breast tissue.
- Lymph node removal: May occur if there is evidence that cancer has spread outside of the breast.
- Chemotherapy: Medicine used to weaken and destroy the cancer cells in the body.
- Radiation therapy: Use high radiation beams to destroy cancer cells in the breast.
- Hormone therapy: Using hormones to reduce or stop estrogen, which can promote certain breast cancer formation.
- Targeted therapy: Therapy used to target certain aspects of the cancer cells in order to destroy them.

Barriers to Care: Sexual Minority Women (SMW) have an increased risk of developing breast cancer because they are more likely to smoke and drink alcoholic beverages; less likely to bear children; and sometimes neglect breast examinations and mammograms, in part due to fear of discrimination they may face from their health care providers or lack of adequate health insurance.

If diagnosed at an early stage, breast cancer has an encouraging survival rate – up to 97% of women diagnosed with localized breast cancer survive. The best chance of surviving breast cancer is early detection through regular self-breast examinations, clinical breast examinations by health care providers, and annual mammograms.

Resources:

BreastCancer.org

<http://www.breastcancer.org>

Breast Cancer DIY

<http://www.breastcancerdiy.com/>

Breast Cancer Network of Strength

<http://www.networkofstrength.org>

Phone: 1-800-221-2141

Heading the Love/Avon Army of Women

<http://www.armyofwomen.org>

Self Breast Assessment Form

[Mautner Project Self Breast Risk Assessment Form](#)

Self Breast Exam Video by Susan G. Komen for the Cure

<http://ww5.komen.org/>

[BreastCancer/InteractiveTools.html](#)

Susan G. Komen for the Cure

<http://www.komen.org>

The Sister Study

<http://www.sisterstudy.org/>

[English/index1.htm](#)

Someone I Love Is Sick

<http://www.someone>

[iloveissick.com](#)

Virginia Breast Cancer Foundation

<http://www.vbcf.org/>

Phone: (800) 345-8223

If you would like more information on breast health and breast cancer, please send us an email at

info@mautnerproject.org.