

## October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Breast cancer is a group of diseases that affects breast tissue.

Although men are diagnosed with breast cancer, it remains a predominately female disease. Age is an important risk factor for breast cancer due to longer life expectancies and improved screening techniques.

When breast cancer begins growing it is too small to feel and generally does not cause signs and symptoms. As it grows, there can be changes in how the breast looks or feels. The kind of breast cancer depends on which cells in the breast turn into cancer. Breast cancer can begin in different parts of the breast.

A breast is made up of three main parts: lobules, ducts and connective tissue. The lobules are glands that produce milk. The ducts carry milk to the nipple. The connective tissue (which consists of fibrous and fatty tissue) surrounds and holds everything together. Most breast cancers begin in the ducts or lobules. When breast cancer spreads outside the breast tissue through blood vessels and lymph vessels it is said to have metastasized.

Who has a higher risk? Some women are at a higher risk than others if:

- You have close relatives diagnosed with breast or ovarian cancer at age 45 or younger.
- You have changes in certain breast cancer genes (BRCA1 and BRCA2).
- You are of Ashkenazi Jewish heritage.
- You were treated with radiation therapy to the breast or chest in childhood or early adulthood.
- You have had breast cancer or other breast health problems, lobular carcinoma in situ, ductal carcinoma in situ, atypical ductal hyperplasia, or atypical lobular hyperplasia.

Signs and symptoms may include:

- A new lump in the breast or underarm. Most often occurs in the upper, outer quadrant.
- Thickening or swelling of part of the breast.
- Irritation or dimpling of breast skin.
- Redness or flaky skin in the any area of breast.
- Pulling in of the nipple or pain in this area.
- Nipple discharge other than breast milk, including blood.
- Any change in the size or shape of the breast tissue.
- Pain in any area of the breast.

Prevention and Early Detection

- Monthly self-breast exams on the same day.

- Yearly breast exams with a physician and mammogram.
- Regular exercise, maintain a healthy weight.
- Limit the amount of alcohol you drink to one drink per day.
- Family history- A first degree relative, particularly when premenopausal or bilateral breasts involved, colon, endometrial or ovarian cancer increases the risk.

Source: [www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/basic\\_info/index](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/basic_info/index)