

Fall 2005 Wellness Article



Breast Cancer

In the amount of time it takes to brew a cup of coffee or write an e-mail, you can perform a simple test that may help save your life. In that same amount of time, about every twelve minutes, someone in North America will lose their life – to breast cancer. October is Breast Cancer Awareness month, and a great chance to establish a monthly routine that everyone, male and female, should adopt.

About 211,000 women and 1,600 men in the United States will be found to have invasive breast cancer in 2005. Fortunately with early detection and treatment, less than 5% of those numbers are expected to be fatal.¹ Important steps in preventing breast cancer include education, addressing some of the myths, and overcoming fear.

It can be quite daunting visiting the doctor for a mammogram. Granted, there are more comfortable ways to spend your time, but they are surprisingly quick and painless. Usually performed by a woman, the procedure lasts only 20 or 30 minutes, and results are provided within a month.

A few recommendations when scheduling a mammogram:

- Do it! Take charge of your own health. Aggressive, preventive health care is the best approach.
- For women, it is best to schedule the exam one to two weeks following your period to avoid discomfort due to swelling.
- Report any changes in the feel of your breasts, no matter how small, to your doctor.
- Communicate any family history of breast cancer to your doctor.

Have a poor memory? No excuse. The American Cancer Society website will send you or a loved one a reminder e-mail each year. Just visit www.cancer.org and sign up for their mammogram reminder. Perfect for those over forty, who are recommended to schedule a mammogram each year.

For those under forty, clinical breast exams performed by a doctor or nurse are recommended every three years. However, monthly breast self-examinations should begin at age twenty. Inspect your breasts in the mirror, both with your arms at your side and overhead. Before you finish your shower, take a moment to examine your breasts for any lumps or knots. Report discharge of any kind to your doctor.

Remember that you are not alone in your fight against breast cancer. There are currently more than 2 million women in the United States who have been treated for breast cancer. There are many opportunities to become part of the cause by helping to raise awareness, donating money, or volunteering your time.

For more information on breast cancer, including treatments and ways to get involved in your area, visit the [American Cancer Society](http://www.cancer.org) or speak with your doctor. Take the first step in facing cancer head on.

¹ American Cancer Society, Statistics for 2005