

Simple tips for promoting breast cancer awareness in your own life

Breast cancer is a prolific disease with an estimated 192,370 new cases diagnosed this year in women and 1,910 new cases diagnosed in men, according to the National Cancer Institute. This year, National Breast Cancer Awareness Month celebrates 25 years of promoting awareness, education and empowerment. Since its inception a quarter century ago, NBCAM has grown into a partnership of national public service organizations, professional medical associations and government agencies at the forefront of promoting important breast cancer issues.

In recognition of this 25th anniversary milestone, here are five simple ways to celebrate breast cancer awareness in your own life, courtesy of the NBCAM organization:



Know your risks

The risk of developing breast cancer is not the same for all women. According to the National Cancer Institute age is the single most important risk factor for breast cancer. But research has also shown that personal and family history of breast cancer, alterations in certain genes, reproductive and menstrual history, body weight, level of physical activity and alcohol consumption are among the factors that affect a woman's risk of developing breast cancer. Talk to your doctor about your risk of developing breast cancer.

Practice healthy habits

While there are some breast cancer risk factors that women cannot avoid - such as age and genetics - there are also steps that women can take to help prevent breast cancer on their own. Women should know that exposure to tobacco and excessive alcohol consumption are risk factors for breast cancer, as well as other cancers. In addition, research suggests that women can decrease their risk of cancer simply by eating healthy and exercising regularly. Make small changes now to embrace a healthier, more active lifestyle tomorrow. You may want to start by adding a brisk lunch time walk to your day, adding more fruits and vegetables and limiting fat and alcohol in your diet.

Schedule your annual mammogram

Evidence shows that early detection of breast cancer greatly improves a woman's chance for successful treatment, and scheduling regular mammograms is the most effective way of catching cancer early. The American Cancer Society recommends that all women age 40 and older should have a screening mammogram every year, and should continue to do so for as long as they are in good health. For more information about breast cancer and screenings and to locate a free or low-cost clinic, visit www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast or call (800) CDC-Info.

Know that there is hope

Thanks to early detection and improvements in treatment, more women are surviving breast cancer, remaining disease-free and living longer, healthier lives. Today, nearly 90 percent of women who are diagnosed with breast cancer will survive their disease at least five years, up from just 75 percent 35 years ago, according to the National Cancer Institute. Moreover, the death rate from breast cancer in women has decreased by 2.2 percent annually between 1990 and 2004, according to the American Cancer Society. Today, there is a flourishing community of 2.5 million breast cancer survivors in the United States, and there is a great deal to be hopeful about.

Educate yourself

Empower yourself by learning as much as possible about breast cancer. While October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, the NBCAM organization wants to remind you that breast cancer awareness and education is important all year long.

For more information, visit the www.NBCAM.org Web site, a year-round resource for breast cancer patients, survivors, caregivers, and the general public.