

## Think pink: breast cancer awareness



### What is breast cancer?

Breast cancer happens when cells in the breast split and grow out of control. The most common types of breast cancer are found in milk glands and milk ducts. When cancer cells spread to other parts of the body, the cancer is invasive. When cancer cells stay where they grow, it's noninvasive (carcinoma in situ).<sup>2,3</sup>

We see it everywhere: on stickers, magnets, lapels and T-shirts. The pink ribbon is a well-known symbol that has raised awareness for breast cancer. Most of us know someone who's had this serious disease – a mother, sister, neighbor or friend.

And it's no wonder. About one in eight women in the U.S. will get invasive breast cancer. In fact, it's the second most common cancer among U.S. women.<sup>1</sup>

## Looking at risk factors

Risk factors aren't causes of breast cancer. But they're linked to a greater chance of getting it. Having one or more risk factors doesn't mean you'll get breast cancer. In fact, most women who have some risk factors never get the disease.<sup>4</sup>

Some risk factors for breast cancer:

- Being a woman
- Getting older. Only about 13 percent of invasive breast cancers are found in women under age 45. About 66 percent are found in women 55 or older.
- Having a family member with breast cancer
- Having your first child after age 35
- Starting menopause after age 55
- Having your first period before age 12
- Using birth control pills now or recently
- Not being active
- Drinking alcohol. Women who have two to five drinks a day have 1.5 times the risk of women who don't drink.
- Being overweight or obese<sup>4,5</sup>

You can't control some of the risk factors, like age and family background. But you can control risk factors like weight and alcohol use. You can lower your risk by eating a healthy diet and getting screened. You can also lower your risk by avoiding hormone therapy after menopause.<sup>4,6</sup>



## Visit [empireblue.com](http://empireblue.com) for more ways to get healthy – and stay healthy.

The information contained in this flier is provided for educational purposes only, and should not be interpreted as medical advice. Please check with your doctor for medical advice about changes that may affect your health and before taking any drugs or beginning any lifestyle program. Some services may not be covered under your health plan. Please refer to your *Group Certificate* and *Schedule of Benefits* for details about benefits, treatments and exclusions.

### Sources:

- <sup>1</sup> American Cancer Society website: *What Are the Key Statistics for Breast Cancer?* (March 2009): cancer.org.
- <sup>2</sup> Mayo Clinic website: *Types of Breast Cancer* (December 2007): mayoclinic.com.
- <sup>3</sup> Susan G. Komen for the Cure website: *What Is Breast Cancer?* (2009): komen.org.
- <sup>4</sup> American Cancer Society website: *What Are the Risk Factors for Breast Cancer?* (March 2009): cancer.org.
- <sup>5</sup> Susan G. Komen for the Cure website: *What Affects Your Risk of Getting Breast Cancer?* (March 2009): komen.org.
- <sup>6</sup> Centers for Disease Control website: *Reducing Risk* (March 2009): cdc.gov.
- <sup>7</sup> American Cancer Society website: *Can Breast Cancer Be Found Early?* (March 2009): cancer.org.
- <sup>8</sup> Centers for Disease Control website: *Screening* (October 2006): cdc.gov.
- <sup>9</sup> Centers for Disease Control website: *Symptoms* (October 2006): cdc.gov.
- <sup>10</sup> American Cancer Society website: *How Is Breast Cancer Diagnosed?* (March 2009): cancer.org.
- <sup>11</sup> Susan G. Komen for the Cure website: *Breast Cancer in Men* (December 2011): komen.org.
- <sup>12</sup> Susan G. Komen for the Cure website: *Breast Cancer in Pregnancy* (March 2009): komen.org.

## Screening

Breast cancer screening tests look for evidence of the disease before you have symptoms. The size of the cancer and the stage when it's found affect treatment and survival.<sup>7</sup>

The main screening tests are mammograms, clinical breast exams and breast self-exams. Ask your doctor which ones are best for you and how often you should have them.

**Mammogram:** This is an X-ray of the breast. A mammogram is the best way to find breast cancer early. That's when treatment may work better.

**Clinical breast exam:** In a clinical exam, a doctor or nurse feels for lumps and changes in the breast.

**Breast self-exam:** This is a self-check of your own breasts for lumps and changes in size and shape.<sup>8</sup>

## Know the symptoms

Breast cancer symptoms vary from person to person. Some people with breast cancer may have no symptoms at all. That's why the recommended screening tests are so important.<sup>9</sup> As more people get mammograms, more breast cancers are found early. But mammograms can't find all breast cancers.<sup>10</sup> Some warning signs:

- A new lump in the breast or armpit
- Thickening or swelling of part of the breast
- Irritation or dimpling of the skin
- Red or flaky skin in the breast or nipple area
- Pulling in of the nipple or pain in the nipple area
- Nipple discharge other than breast milk
- Change in size or shape of the breast
- Pain in any part of the breast<sup>9,10</sup>

These symptoms don't mean you have breast cancer. But talk about them with your doctor as soon as possible. Death rates from breast cancer have dropped since the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> These falling rates may be a result of better breast cancer awareness. So keep up with your scheduled mammograms – and tell your friends to do the same. You just might save a life.

## Male breast cancer

Though breast cancer happens mostly in women, men can get it, too. The U.S. breast cancer ratio is one man to every 100 women. In 2011, about 2,000 new cases would be men, and about 450 would die of it.<sup>11</sup>

## Did you know?

Breast cancer rarely happens during pregnancy. But it's the most common cancer found in pregnant women – about one in 3,000 women. It's harder to find lumps during pregnancy, when breasts are larger and more sensitive. So it's vital that pregnant women do self-exams and get clinical exams.<sup>12</sup>

## Resources

The National Cancer Institute (NCI) has a hotline where experts can answer questions. They can also send booklets, fact sheets and other materials. You can reach the hotline at 800-4-CANCER. For materials and other information on the NCI website, go to cancer.gov. Visit Susan G. Komen for the Cure at komen.org for more on breast cancer. You'll also find materials and tools online.

