

Celebrate Every Year After Forty, with a Mammogram

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By Angela Butera Dickson

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Celebrate the month of your birth by having a mammogram – toast your life with this fast, easy and noninvasive test.

A first mammogram is a right of passage for most women at forty. 66.9% of women over the age of forty have had baseline mammograms to establish and document their breast health. But 30% of women have somehow missed this important message and it is an especially important one for the Hispanic and Asian communities who have the lowest average screening rates among American women.

There has been much confusion and controversy in the media about the benefits of mammography in the last two years. In a Danish study that was released in 2001 researchers concluded widespread mammography screening was unjustified. This study along with the numerous ensuing counter arguments criticizing the studies methodology has left many women unsure of the benefits of mammography.

On May 14 of this past year The American Cancer Society released its guidelines emphasizing the role and important benefits of mammography. The panel of independent experts reconfirmed that regular mammography screening reduces breast cancer deaths.

Mammography screening is endorsed by The American Cancer Society, The National Alliance of Breast Cancer Organizations, The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as well as the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF).

Breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed female cancer in the United States. One out of every 10 women will be diagnosed with the disease and 40,000 women will die from breast cancer in the United States this year.

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According to The National Alliance of Breast Cancer Organizations web site, "Although some breast cancers are found by women themselves, the vast majority are now detected by mammography at early stages, and at a size too small to be felt."

Almost every woman should have a baseline mammogram done at age 40 and every two years after that until age 50 (75% of all breast cancers are found in women over the age of 50). Some practitioners even suggest yearly testing for all women over 40. At age 50 and beyond a mammogram should be done yearly. Those with a family history of breast cancer should talk with their doctor about the possible need for earlier testing.

It is an uncomplicated, non–evasive procedure that literally takes a few minutes of your time but it could very well be the test that saves your life.

What if you can't afford screening?

Most medical insurance policies cover mammogram screenings and for those without health insurance there are many low cost and no cost programs available. Check with your local chapter of The American Cancer Society, the women's health center at your local hospital or Department of Human Services for low or no cost programs offered in your community.

What To Expect

It is always easier to keep a medical appointment when you know what to expect and information is so important in having a relaxed and comfortable procedure.

First of all, for menstruating women, schedule your appointment shortly after you have finished your period. This is a time when you are least likely to have breast tenderness and sensitivity or additional swelling of the breast tissue from fluid retention.

It is best to avoid wearing underarm deodorant the day of your test because the chemicals in some products can mimic calcification spots on the highly sensitive x–ray film.

You will be asked to undress from the waist up and will be given a hospital gown and robe to wear.

The technician will explain the procedure to you. She will gently position your breast on the small, adjustable machine platform, a metal square of about 12" X 12". Many thoughtful technicians will warm up the metal with a heating pad for a few moments before starting your test.

It is necessary to flatten the breast tissue as much as possible and this is typically done with a clear Lucite panel or paddle. It can be a little uncomfortable but it is necessary and shouldn't be painful. The flatter the breast tissue the less radiation is needed, resulting in less exposure to your body and the best possible picture. Some screening sites will allow the patient to adjust the pressure herself to minimize discomfort. Ask about this if you feel it will help to minimize any anxiety you may be feeling.

Then you will be asked to stand very still and hold your breath, as the x–ray is taken. The machine will

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automatically release pressure on your breast as soon as it is done. It takes about 10 seconds from the time the pressure is applied until you're released.

Typically two different views of each breast will be shot for a total of four 10 second periods of breast compression.

You shouldn't experience breasts pain during the test. If this happens tell the technician and together you should be able to find a suitable position to make it comfortable for you.

Celebrate Your Life!

Make mammography a part of your yearly health physical along with your blood pressure and cholesterol screening, Pap test and eye checkup. Think of it as nurturing yourself. Each birthday is a time to celebrate the life you've lived and ensure that you continue to live healthfully ever after.

For more information please see these web sites :

The USDA site form Mammography

The National Alliance of Breast Cancer Organizations

The American Cancer Society

Angela Butera Dickson is a full service, freelance copywriter offering some of the best prices on the web. From articles to brochure copy, ghostwriting to marketing letters, she can help you cultivate a polished, professional business image.

Breast Cancer: Steps To Aid In Early Detection

By Donna Rivera–Loudon

I learned some interesting facts about breast cancer that I feel every woman should know. The sources I used for this article included the American Cancer Society, The National Cancer Institute, and the Avon Foundation's Breast Cancer Crusade.

Early breast cancer isn't usually detected by pain. In fact, when breast cancer first develops, there may be no symptoms at all. That is why regular exams are important. If you have anything that makes you suspect breast cancer, contact your doctor immediately. Don't wait around to see what happens. Let the professional decide. Some symptoms that may indicate breast cancer include, but are not limited to, the following:

Nipple discharge or tenderness

Lumps in breast and/or underarm area

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Visual changes which include: size of breast including swelling; inverted nipple; and pitting. Pitting means the skin looks like the skin of an orange. Scaling of the breast skin could also be a symptom.

Early detection of breast cancer is important. There is a 97% five-year survival rate when breast cancer is detected early since this can help prevent it from spreading. Below are some guidelines to early detection. I hope they help save someone's life.

Get a Mammogram

A mammogram is a specialized x-ray of the breast to help detect cancers which cannot be detected by feel. Some women are confused as to how often they should get a mammogram. Here is what the professionals say about mammograms.

At age 40 begin getting annual mammograms by a licensed technician. A mammogram will take about twenty minutes. When getting a mammogram avoid wearing deodorant, powders, or cream under your arms. Sometimes they can interfere with the results. Make sure to contact the center if they do not inform you of the results within thirty days. It is very important that results are compared from one year to the next. Hence, be sure you know where your mammogram film is being held.

Clinical Breast Exam

This is an exam by a health care professional. Women in their 20s and 30s should have a clinical breast exam at least every three years and women 40 or older should have an exam each year.

Self-Examination

Starting at age 20 women should begin doing a self-exam. Ask your doctor if you are not exactly sure how to do this or if you are not sure you are doing it correctly. Here are a few guides to follow: Lie down and place one arm behind your head. Using your three middle finger pads press firmly across your breast in overlapping dime-size circular motions. Use three different levels of pressure: light,

medium, and firm. This allows you to feel the tissue close to your skin, to feel a little deeper, and to feel the tissue closest to your chest and ribs.

Move across your breast in an up and down pattern, starting from the underarm and moving across the breast to the middle of the chest bone, repeating the pressure.

Stand in front of a mirror with your hands pressing down on your hips and look at your breasts for any changes in size, shape, contour, or dimpling. Also, do this with your arms slightly raised. Make sure you check under your breasts as well.

I hope that this information proves helpful to you. I am not a health care provider and by no means a professional on breast cancer. I am simply sharing with every woman possible the importance of detecting breast cancer early and some simple guidelines that might save a life.

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My sources for the above information are:

American Cancer Society The National Cancer Institute Breast Health Resource Guide by the Avon Foundation's Breast Cancer Crusade

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