

BREAST CANCER SCREENING

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Early detection is still the most important defense available to patients in preventing the development of life-threatening, advanced-stage breast cancer. Breast cancer screening is when doctors examine the breasts for early signs of cancer in patients who have no symptoms. Factors associated with an increased risk in breast cancer include being female, increasing age, a personal and/or family history of breast cancer, inherited genes that increase the risk of cancer, obesity, drinking alcohol, beginning your period at a younger age, having your first child at an older age, having never been pregnant, beginning menopause at an older age, postmenopausal hormone therapy, and radiation exposure. The earlier breast cancer is found, the more easily and successfully it can be treated. The two most common methods used for early detection are a clinical breast exam and mammogram. Your doctor may use ultrasound if there are suspicious findings on mammography or physical examination. Your doctor also may use Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) as a screening test if you have a high risk of breast cancer.

CURRENT BREAST CANCER SCREENING RECOMMENDATIONS:

FOR WOMEN AT AVERAGE RISK FOR BREAST CANCER:

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) 2016 guidelines recommend:

- A screening mammogram every 2 years for women between the ages of 50 to 74 years.
- For women aged 40 to 49 years, the balance of benefits and harms of screening is not as clear. The USPSTF states that the decision to start regular screening mammography every 2 years in women before the age of 50 years should be an individual one based on the woman's values regarding specific benefits and harms, her health history, and what she prefers. Your doctor can help you understand the balance of potential benefits and harms of screening in your specific case.

The American Cancer Society (2015 update) recommends:

- Women should start regular screening at the age of 45 years with a mammogram every year until the age of 54 years.
- Women at the age of 55 years and older, should transition to having a mammogram every 2 years. This can continue as long as their overall health is good and they are expected to live 10 or more years. The Society also states that women should have another option based on their values and preferences. This option is to begin annual screening mammography between the ages of 40 and 44 years and have the opportunity to continue screening annually at the age of 55 years and older.

The age at which screening no longer helps reduce death from breast cancer is not known. If you are the age of 75 years or older, talk to your family doctor about mammography as a regular part of your health care plan.

MEDICAL CARE & TREATMENT OPTIONS:

If you have any questions about breast cancer screening, please contact your Osteopathic Family Physician. With a thorough history and physical exam, along with assessing your risk for breast cancer, your family doctor will help you determine which current screening recommendations will be best for you. In case of any emergency, you should call your doctor or 911 right away.

SOURCE(S): American Cancer Society, Breast Cancer Screening. Gov, Medscape, and USPSTF.

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