

Breast Cancer Awareness

By Murphy Vestute, October 2001

Every woman can actively take part in the early detection of breast cancer. Breast cancer is the leading cause of death for women ages 25 – 55 in America!

Women between the ages of 20 – 39 should have a monthly breast self-exam and a clinical breast exam every 3 years, according to the American Cancer Society.

Women forty and over should have an annual mammogram, which is an x-ray of the breast, a monthly breast self-exam, and an annual clinical breast exam, which is performed by a doctor or a nurse.

Women should be aware of certain breast cancer symptoms: a lump or thickening in or near the breast or in the underarm area; a change in the size or shape of the breast; a discharge from the nipple; or a change in the color or feel of the skin of the breast, nipple or areola.

Breast cancer risks are individual, but the following are risk factors strongly related to the disease:

- age,
- a family history of breast cancer,
- never having borne a child,
- having your first child after the age of 30,
- having your first menstrual period at an early age, and/or
- a history of benign breast disease that required biopsies.

Other breast conditions, such as lobular carcinoma in situ, which is abnormal cells in the lobules of the breast, or atypical hyperplasia, which is a benign condition in which breast tissue has certain abnormal features, are also risk factors strongly related to breast cancer.

The American Cancer Society, the National Alliance of Breast Cancer Organization and the Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, among other organizations, have free up-to-date information. Just call them or contact them online, and tell them what you are looking for and they will be sure to help you.

Remember: ALL women are at risk for breast cancer! Do something (nice) for yourself: a breast self-exam is the first line of defense in detecting breast cancer.