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BREAST HEALTH

A woman's breasts change constantly. They change during the menstrual cycle, pregnancy, breast-feeding, and menopause. These changes can sometimes bring problems. **Most** of the problems are insignificant, but a few can be serious. One serious problem is breast cancer. The key to surviving breast cancer is **early detection**.

The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation Guidelines for breast cancer detection are as follows:

Breast self-exam*

Age 20+ Monthly

Clinical breast exam**

Age 20 - 39 Every 3 years

Age 40+ Yearly

Mammography***

Age 40+ Yearly

* *Women who entered menopause, are pregnant or breast-feeding, and women who have silicone implants should continue to examine their breasts monthly.*

** *Your personal physician may recommend more frequent clinical breast exams based on your health history and exam.*

*** *Your personal physician may recommend mammography at an earlier age based on your risk factors.*

BREAST SELF-EXAM (BSE)

Breast self-exam is one of the best early cancer detection methods. By practicing breast self-exam, you will get used to the normal feel of your breasts and thus detect any abnormal changes. Seek medical attention immediately if you should discover a lump or find any changes.

When to examine your breasts

- A week from the first day of your period when your breasts are least tender.
- On the same day of each month if you no longer menstruate
- Breast-feeding mothers should examine their breasts when all the milk has been expressed.

How to examine your breasts

I. Position

Stand in front of a mirror in each of these positions and look for changes in:

1. the size and shape of the breasts, like dimpling, puckering, or swellings.
2. color and texture of the skin and nipple
3. evidence of discharge from the nipples

- Arms raised above head
- Arms relaxed at side
- Hands on hips
- Bending forward

II. Perimeter

The exam area is bounded by the line which extends down from the middle of the armpit to just beneath the breast, continues across the underside of the breast to the middle of the breast bone then moves up and along the collar bone and back to the middle of the armpit. Most breast cancers occur in the upper outer area of the breast (shaded area).

1. Flat Position: Lie flat on your back with a pillow or folded towel under the shoulder of the breast to be examined.
2. (For women with large breasts) Side-lying or the "Twist" Position: Lie on the opposite side of the breast to be examined. Rotate the shoulder (on the same side as the breast to be examined) back to the flat surface. Use the side-lying position to examine the outer half of your breast.

III. How To Feel Your Breast Tissue?

- Use the pads of the three middle fingers to feel every inch of your breast tissue for lumps. Move your fingers in small circles and do not lift your fingers from your breast between each area. You can use lotion or powder to help your finger glide from one area to the next.

IV. Pressure

- Feel with various levels of pressure, from light to medium, to firm, to examine the full thickness of your breast tissue. Using pressure will not injure the breast. Use each pressure level to feel the breast tissue before moving on to the next area.

V. Pattern of Search

- Examine your breast in an up and down line. Check the entire breast area and remember how your breasts feel from month to month.
- Feel carefully beneath the nipple.
- Examine the breast tissue that extends into your armpit.
- Women who have had any breast surgery should still examine the entire area and the incision. Examine the incision carefully from end to end.
- Squeeze your nipple to check for discharge.

VI. Practice With Feedback

- Learn how to perform BSE from your doctor, nurse, or health educator. It is important that you perform BSE while your instructor is watching to be sure you are doing it correctly. Practice your skills under supervision until you feel comfortable and confident.

VII. Plan of Action

- **Discuss** the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation breast cancer detection guidelines with your healthcare professional.
- **Schedule** your clinical breast examination and mammogram as appropriate.
- **Perform** BSE. Ask your health professional for feedback on your BSE skills.
- **Report** any changes to your healthcare professional.

CLINICAL BREAST EXAM (CBE)

A clinical breast exam is an examination of your breasts by a health professional, such as a physician, nurse practitioner, nurse, or physician assistant. For this examination, you undress from the waist up. The health professional will first inspect (look at) your breast for changes in size or shape. Then, using the pads of the fingers, the examiner will gently feel your breasts. Special attention will be given to the shape and texture of the breasts, location of any lumps, and whether such lumps are attached to the skin or to deeper tissues. The area under both arms will also be examined.

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MAMMOGRAM

I. What is a mammogram?

Mammogram is an X-ray examination of the breast. Mammography is used to detect and diagnose breast disease both in women who have breast symptoms such as a lump, pain, or nipple discharge, and women with no symptoms.

II. Why do I need a mammogram?

A woman's risk of developing breast cancer increases as she gets older. Over 3/4 of breast cancers diagnosed each year occur in women over age 50. In many cases, women diagnosed with breast cancer have no family history of the disease. Some breast cancer often has no symptoms early in the disease. A mammogram can detect cancer in its early stage when it is still too small to be felt. Finding breast cancer early can save your life.

III. Is mammogram safe?

Over the past 20 years, mammography techniques and equipment have improved a great deal, and today the level of radiation is very low and not harmful.

IV. What is it like to get a mammogram?

When you get a mammogram, you stand beside the machine, and a specially trained technologist places your breast on a plastic plate. A second piece of plastic is placed on top and for a few seconds, some pressure is applied to flatten the breast and get a good, clear picture. Two pictures usually are taken of each breast. Some women may feel a little discomfort, but most report none. The entire mammography exam takes about 15 minutes. A specialist, called radiologist, will read the mammogram to see if any suspicious areas exist.

If you have sensitive breasts, try having your mammogram at a time of the month when your breasts will be least tender. Try to avoid the week right before your period. This will help to lessen discomfort.

Don't wear deodorant, powder, or cream, under your arms - it may interfere with the quality of the mammogram. It's a good idea to wear a blouse with a skirt or slacks, rather than a dress, since you will have to undress above the waist.

Mammogram may still be performed if a patient has breast implants as long as the technician is notified.

V. What happens if they find something?

If a mass is found, the doctor will perform a biopsy, which involves taking out part or all of the suspicious tissue. It is then examined under a microscope by a specialist called a pathologist. A biopsy is the only sure way to know if cancer is present. It's important to remember that even if you are told you need a biopsy, more than 80% of lumps or suspicious areas are not cancer.

If the biopsy shows that there is cancer, the woman and her doctor will discuss treatment options. Early cancer often can be treated by removing the lump or a portion of the breast rather than the whole breast.

VI. How often do I need a mammogram?

The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation recommends mammogram **yearly** for women aged 40 and older. Depending upon your health history, your doctor may recommend a baseline mammogram at 35 years old.

VII. How can I get a mammogram?

Mammograms are covered by Medicare, MediCal, and most private health insurance plans. Many public health departments, hospitals, and clinics may also offer low-cost or free mammograms. In California, women may also receive free mammograms through the Cancer Detection Programs: Every Woman Counts (CDPEWC).

For help in finding a place to get a quality mammogram, call the Chinese Community Cancer Information Center at (415) 677-2458.