

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month

According to the American Cancer Society, breast cancer is the most common cancer in American women, except for skin cancers. Currently, the average risk of a woman in the US developing breast cancer is 13%; that means there's a 1 in 8 chance a woman will develop breast cancer in her lifetime.

While some breast cancer is found after symptoms have appeared, many women experience no symptoms. This is why regular screenings are so important! When the cancer is found early, is small and has not spread, chances of treating it successfully are much greater.

Symptoms

According to the Centers for Disease Control, some warning signs of breast cancer are:

- Any change in the size or shape of the breast
- A new lump in the breast or armpit
- Thickening or swelling of part of the breast
- Irritation or dimpling of breast skin
- Redness or flaky skin in the nipple area of the breast
- Pulling in of the nipple or pain in the nipple area
- Pain in any area of the breast
- Nipple discharge other than breast milk (including blood)

Please note that some of these symptoms can happen with other medical conditions that are not cancer.

Mammograms

According to the CDC, mammograms are still considered the best way to find breast cancer early, before it's big enough to feel or cause symptoms. For women at average risk for breast cancer, the American Cancer Society recommendations for the early detection of breast cancer are as follows:

- **Ages 40-44** – Women should have the choice to start annual breast cancer screening with mammograms
- **Ages 45-54** – Women should get mammograms every year
- **Ages 55 and older** – Women can switch to mammograms every two years or can continue yearly screenings

The County's health plans cover annual screening mammograms, including 3D mammograms, under the preventive services benefit beginning at age 40.



Mammograms and the COVID-19 Pandemic

At the beginning of the pandemic, elective procedures like screenings were put on hold to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. According to the CDC, one unfortunate consequence is a substantial decline in cancer screenings, which are important in detecting cancer at an early stage when there are no symptoms. Delayed screenings could cause a delay in cancer diagnosis which can lead to a more advanced stage cancer. **If you have any signs or symptoms that might be from cancer, you should discuss with your provider right away.** If you need assistance finding a provider, locating a radiology facility or setting-up an appointment, please contact Health Bridges of Northern California at 800-318-1529.

Things You Can Do That May Lower Your Risk

There is no way to prevent breast cancer, but there are some things you can do that may lower your risk:

- Get to and stay at a healthy weight
- Be physically active
- Limit or avoid alcohol
- Breastfeed
- Don't smoke
- Limit hormone therapy