Finding breast cancer early

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Breast Cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed in women after non-malignant skin cancer. Although it can occur at any age it is more common in older women. In most cases the earlier breast cancer is diagnosed and treated the better the outcome. Cancer Council recommends:

• all women, regardless of age, be 'Breast aware' by familiarising themselves with the normal look and feel of their breasts
• women aged 50-74 have a free screening mammogram every two years through BreastScreen Australia
• see a doctor as soon as possible if any breast changes are noticed.

Early detection of breast cancer

Common ways of finding breast cancer early in women without breast symptoms include:

• breast awareness
• physical breast examination by a health professional
• screening mammography (breast x-ray).

Being ‘Breast aware’

Every woman should look at and feel her breasts regularly. That way they get to know what is normal for them and making it easier to notice any new or unusual changes.

1. Get to know your own breasts
2. See a doctor immediately if you see or feel any changes:

• A lump or lumpiness or thickness in the breast
• Changes in skin, dimpling, puckering or redness
• Any changes in appearance or size of breasts
• Changes in the nipple including discharge or a change in the direction of the nipple
• Any pain
• An area that feels different form the rest of the breast

3. If you are aged 50-74 have a mammogram(breast x-ray) at BreastScreen SA every two years. (Women from 40 are also eligible to attend)
4. Talk to your doctor if there is a history of breast cancer in your family

Even if you’re having regular mammograms you still need to be aware of any changes in your breasts.
What is a screening mammogram?

Mammograms are low dose x-rays of a woman’s breasts. Screening mammograms are performed on women without any symptoms or breast changes. Screening mammograms are currently the best method available for detecting breast cancer early but do not cure or prevent breast cancer from developing in the future.

Related links

BreastScreen SA—find out more about mammograms, clinic locations
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/breastscreen

Breast Screen Australia Program—more information about the National program

Cancer Australia—provides comprehensive information about all aspects of breast cancer

Find out your risk of breast cancer—online risk assessment including explanation of risk factors

The early detection of breast cancer: screening mammograms—Cancer Council Australia fact sheet
ED_breast_cancer.htm

Diethylstilbestrol (DES) and Cancer - DES was taken by some women in the 1950-70’s to try and prevent miscarriage and other pregnancy complications. Although the majority of persons exposed to DES, during pregnancy or in utero, will not experience any negative health effects, available research findings indicate that exposure to DES increases the risk of some health problems including some cancers.

Want to know where this information comes from? Click here.

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