



BREAST CANCER AWARENESS: EARLY DETECTION TECHNIQUES YOU NEED TO KNOW

Discover essential techniques for self-examination, when to seek medical advice, and how to track changes in breast health to take proactive steps for your well-being.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer affecting women globally, and in South Africa, one in 27 women is at risk of developing it. Early detection is crucial, offering a 99% five-year survival rate when breast cancer is found in its localised stage. This article will guide you through the early signs and symptoms, how to conduct self-examinations, and when to seek medical advice, empowering you to take control of your breast health.

COMMON SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF BREAST CANCER

Recognising the early signs of breast cancer can make all the difference in treatment outcomes. The most common signs include:

- A lump in the breast or underarm
- Changes in the size or shape of the breast

- Skin irritation, dimpling, or redness
- Nipple discharge (excluding breast milk)
- Pain in the breast or nipple area.

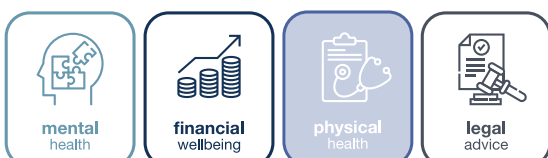
While some of these symptoms may not be due to cancer, it's vital to get any changes checked by a healthcare professional.

SELF-EXAMINATIONS: A KEY TO EARLY DETECTION

Monthly breast self-examinations (BSE) help you become familiar with the normal look and feel of your breasts, making it easier to detect changes. Ideally, a BSE should be done one week after your period ends. By consistently performing self-exams, you can increase your chances of catching early abnormalities.

TYPES OF MEDICAL SCREENINGS

Medical screening is essential for detecting breast cancer early. Here are the key methods:



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- **Clinical Breast Exam (CBE):** Healthcare providers recommend that women in their 20s and 30s have a CBE every three years, increasing annually for women over 40.
- **Mammograms:** These low-dose X-ray images can detect lumps or abnormalities even before they can be felt. Women are advised to start mammograms between the ages of 40-50, depending on risk factors.
- **Ultrasounds and MRIs:** These imaging techniques may be used alongside mammograms for a more detailed view, especially for women with dense breast tissue or high-risk factors.

RISK FACTORS

Knowing your personal risk factors, such as family history, genetic mutations (BRCA1/BRCA2), or a history of breast conditions, is essential. If you experience persistent changes or symptoms, schedule a medical consultation. As Lorraine Govender, National Manager of Health Promotion at CANSA, emphasises, ‘Regular screenings and understanding the signs of breast cancer are key to early intervention.’

THE IMPORTANCE OF PROACTIVE HEALTH CHOICES

In addition to regular screenings, a healthy lifestyle can also help lower your risk. Maintaining a balanced diet, engaging in regular exercise, and avoiding excessive alcohol consumption and smoking are ways to support breast health. For women with a strong family history of breast cancer, genetic testing or consultations about hormonal therapies may be recommended by healthcare providers.

TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR HEALTH TODAY

The sooner breast cancer is detected, the better the treatment outcomes and survival rates. Regular self-examinations, staying informed about changes in your body, and keeping up with medical screenings will empower you in the fight against breast cancer.

References

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The information is shared on condition that readers will make their own determination, including seeking advice from a professional. E&OE.



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