

Early Detection is Key

Finding breast cancer early, when it is easier to treat and before it is big enough to feel or cause symptoms, is an important step to beating cancer. Early detection can start at home too, with simple breast checks. Try to get in the habit of doing a breast self-examination once a month to familiarize yourself with how your breasts normally look and feel. Examine yourself several days after your period ends, when your breasts are least likely to be swollen and tender. If you are no longer having periods, choose a day that's easy to remember, such as the first or last day of the month.

Another tool for finding cancer early is through a screening exam called a *mammogram*. A mammogram is an X-ray picture of the breast and is performed in a doctor's office. **Most women who are 50 to 74 years old should have a screening mammogram every two years.** If you are 40 to 49 years old, or think you may have a higher risk of breast cancer, ask your doctor when to have a screening mammogram. Your doctor can also go over ways you can lower your risk. In most cases, the cost of mammograms is covered by your health insurance or by Ladies First.

Symptoms

Talk to your doctor if you notice any changes in the breast including:

- A lump or pain in the breast.
- Thickening or swelling of part of the breast.
- Irritation or dimpling of breast skin.
- Redness or flaky skin on the breast.
- Pulling in of the nipple or pain in the nipple area.
- Fluid other than breast milk from the nipple, especially blood.
- A change in the size or the shape of the breast.

Other conditions can cause these symptoms. *If you have any signs that worry you, call your doctor right away.*