

Women's Health



Take Charge of Your Breast Health as You Age

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(NAPS)—October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, a time to raise awareness about one of the most common cancers affecting women. For me, this month is personal as well as professional. I'm a physician caring for older adults—and a breast cancer survivor.

At 34, I found a lump in my breast and was diagnosed with Stage 3 breast cancer. I began chemotherapy on my daughter's third birthday. That experience has stayed with me throughout my career. It's a lasting reminder of how important it is to know your body, seek care when something doesn't feel right and stay connected to your health care team. And while breast cancer becomes more common as we age, there's reason for hope: early detection and preventive care can make a meaningful difference.

Why early detection matters

One of the most important messages I share with my patients is that prevention starts with a strong relationship with a primary care provider. Having someone who knows your health history, understands your risk factors and helps you stay current with recommended screenings can play a critical role in catching potential concerns early.

Many women are surprised to learn that breast cancer often causes no symptoms in its earliest stages. In fact, many breast cancers are first found through routine mammograms, before a woman notices any changes. That is why keeping up with recommended screenings is so important.



Staying up to date on preventive care and recommended screenings can help detect cancer earlier and support better health as you age.

At the same time, I encourage women to pay attention to their bodies and speak up if something doesn't seem right. Talk with a health care provider about a new lump, persistent pain, skin changes, nipple changes or any other noticeable changes in your breasts.

Talk about screenings

Mammograms remain one of our most effective tools for early detection. Because the right screening schedule depends on your age, health history, family history and other risk factors, these conversations should be personal. Ask your provider what screening approach is right for you, especially if you have a family history of breast cancer or other concerns about your risk.

Healthy habits can lower risk

Beyond screenings, lifestyle choices can also help support breast health and overall well-being. Although there is no guaranteed way to prevent breast cancer, research shows that healthy habits can help reduce risk. Aim to stay physically active, maintain a healthy weight, limit alcohol and enjoy a balanced diet. These

steps support overall health and may also help lower the risk of developing certain types of breast cancer.

Make prevention part of healthy aging

Breast health is part of a much bigger picture. At Oak Street Health, we view preventive care as an ongoing commitment to healthy aging. That includes annual wellness visits, routine screenings, vaccinations, medication reviews and conversations about mental and emotional well-being. Preventive care can identify concerns before they become more serious and help your care team build a plan around your needs and goals.

Taking the first step

Scheduling appointments and keeping track of screenings can feel overwhelming, but you do not have to manage it alone. That's why having a trusted primary care team matters. At Oak Street Health, primary care providers and care team members work together to help patients stay on top of preventive care and connect with resources that support their physical, emotional and social needs.

This Breast Cancer Awareness Month, I encourage every woman to take one simple, important step: schedule a conversation with your primary care provider. Whether you're due for a mammogram, have questions about your risk or simply want to make sure you're on track with preventive care, now is a great time to make your health a priority.

Small actions today can have a lasting impact for years to come. Staying informed, proactive and connected to your care team can make all the difference.

To learn more or find an Oak Street Health location near you, visit OakStreetHealth.com or call 833-696-0314.