



## October: Breast Cancer Awareness Month

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, a national program dedicated to increasing awareness of breast cancer issues, especially the importance of early detection. Breast cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed in women in Canada and the second leading cause of death from cancer.

When breast cancer is detected early and treated promptly, suffering and the risk of death can be significantly reduced. Women are encouraged to ask their doctors and other health care providers about mammography screening. Mammography (an X-ray picture of the breast) is the single most effective method to detect breast changes that may be cancer, long before physical symptoms can be seen or felt.

As women age, their risk of breast cancer increases. For most women, high-quality mammography screening should begin at age 40. As risk factors vary in everyone, each woman and her doctor should discuss the plan that's right for her.

### Symptoms of Breast Cancer

Breast cancer can cause the following changes:

- A change in how the breast or nipple feels. This may include a lump or thickening in or near the breast or underarm area. It may also include tenderness in the nipple area.
- A change in the size or shape of the breast or a change in the nipple's appearance. For example, the skin of the breast, areola or nipple may be scaly, red or swollen. It may have ridges or pitting so that it looks like the skin of an orange.
- Nipple discharge.

Although early breast cancer usually does not cause pain, you should see your health care provider if you experience breast pain or any other symptom that does not go away. Most often, these symptoms are not cancer, but it is important to check with your health care provider so that any problems can be diagnosed and treated as early as possible.

### Early Detection is Key

When breast cancer is detected at an early stage of development, a number of effective treatment options are available, treatment can be less disfiguring and less toxic and the chances of survival are improved. A woman and her physician will choose the treatment that is right for her, based on the location and extent of the cancer, her age and preferences and the risks and benefits of each treatment. The basic treatment choices for breast cancer are surgery, radiation, chemotherapy and hormonal therapy.

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