Breast Cancer Facts
- The American Cancer Society estimates that this year, 211,300 women will develop invasive breast cancer in the United States and 39,800 women will die of the disease. Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in women.
- Besides being female, age is a woman’s single most important risk factor for developing breast cancer. Nearly half of all new breast cancers occur in women over the age of 65.
- Women with more than one relative who has had breast cancer or with one or more relatives who were diagnosed at a young age have a higher risk of breast cancer and should talk to their doctor or a specialist about their risk.

Benefits of Finding Breast Cancer Early (Early Detection)
- The earlier breast cancer is found, the better the chances for successful treatment. Because most cases of breast cancer cannot be prevented, finding breast cancer early and treating it are the most important strategies in preventing deaths from the disease and decreasing the chance of having to remove the breast.

Mammograms
- Right now, a mammogram is the best way to find breast cancer at an early stage, when treatment is highly successful. A mammogram can find breast changes that may be cancerous years before physical symptoms develop. Results from over 40 years of research clearly show that women who have regular mammograms are more likely to have their breast cancer found early.
- Mammograms are not perfect. They miss some cancers. Also, doctors sometimes recommend tests in addition to a regular mammogram to find out whether something found in a mammogram is or is not cancer. These additional tests can often be stressful. It is important that women having mammograms know what to expect and understand these possibilities. A mammogram, despite limitations, remains a very effective and valuable tool for decreasing suffering and deaths from breast cancer.
- Most women will never develop breast cancer, but for many women it is an important health problem and concern. Getting mammograms every year starting at age 40 is the most important thing a woman can do to find breast cancer at an early stage and have the best chances of successful treatment.

Examining the Breasts
- Breast cancer will sometimes, but not always, be found by breast self-exam (BSE) or clinical breast exam (CBE) by a doctor. But in order to save lives, the exams must find the breast cancer as early as possible. Research has not shown that regular breast exams by either a health professional or by yourself (BSE) will find breast cancer early enough to save lives. Nor has research definitely ruled out any benefit of doing these exams. But because of the clear connection between the size of breast tumors and the chances for successful treatment, and because mammograms will not find all breast cancers, regular physical examination of the breasts by a health care professional (CBE) is recommended. The American Cancer Society also recommends that health care professionals offer instructions to their patients in BSE so that women can become familiar with how their breasts feel. The health professionals should also explain the possible benefits and limitations of BSE so that women can make an informed decision about whether or how often to do BSE.

American Cancer Society Recommendations

For Women in Their 20s and 30s
- If you are in your 20s or 30s, your risk of breast cancer is very low. But because a small number of young women do develop breast cancer, it is important to have a CBE as part of a periodic health
examination, preferably at least every three years, and to become familiar with how your breasts normally feel.

BSE can help you become familiar with how your breasts normally feel. Knowing what is normal for you is important so that if you notice a difference at any time (while dressing, bathing, etc.) you can contact your doctor. If you choose to do BSE, the health professional you see for regular care can show you how, check to see that you are doing it correctly, answer any questions, and explain the importance of promptly reporting any new breast symptoms or problems. It is also okay to choose not to do BSE, or to do BSE but not every month.

For Women Aged 40 and Over

At age 40, you should begin to have a mammogram every year. As long as you are in reasonably good health, you should continue to have mammograms.

Age alone should not be the reason to stop having regular mammograms. However, if you have severe health problems that are likely to shorten your life, you and your doctor may want to discuss stopping.

You should also have a CBE as part of a periodic health examination, preferably every year. You should have the CBE shortly before you have your mammogram. This way, any abnormal areas that might be found by the CBE can be reviewed more carefully in the mammogram.

Report any breast symptoms or breast problems to your doctor immediately.

For Women at Increased Risk of Breast Cancer

Women who have a higher than average risk of developing breast cancer may benefit from starting early detection practices at a younger age or having additional tests or more frequent examinations. Factors that help determine if a woman is at high risk include:

- a strong family history of breast cancer (especially if their mother, sister, or daughter developed breast cancer at a young age or if several close relatives have breast or ovarian cancer).
- genetic tests that showed changes in the **BRCA1** or **BRCA2** breast cancer genes.
- a breast cancer treated in the past.
- radiation therapy in the chest area for another type of cancer.

There is not enough research yet on the value of screening women younger than 40 with mammograms or with other tests such as magnetic resonance imaging and ultrasound. Some doctors may recommend these tests for women with the above risk factors. If you think you are at higher risk based on the factors above, talk to your doctor about what is known about these tests and their potential benefits, limitations, and harms. Then make a decision together about the testing that is best for you.

Tips for a Better Mammogram

- Bring a list of the places and dates of mammograms, biopsies, or other breast treatments you have had before.
- If you have had mammograms at another facility, you should make every attempt to get those mammograms so that they are available to the radiologist at the current examination.
- On the day of the examination, do not wear deodorant; this can interfere with the mammogram by appearing on the x-ray film as spots.
- If your breasts are tender the week before your period, you should avoid mammograms during this time. The best time for you to have a mammogram is one week after your period.
- You should describe any breast symptoms or problems that you are having to the technologist performing the examination. Be prepared to tell the person doing the mammogram (mammography technologist) about hormone use, family or personal history of breast cancer, and any prior surgeries. You should also discuss any changes or problems in your breasts with your doctor or nurse before having a mammogram.
- If you do not hear from your doctor within 10 days, do not assume that your mammogram was normal—call your doctor or the facility.

For more information about mammograms, finding breast cancer early, or about breast cancer, please visit our Web site at www.cancer.org or contact your American Cancer Society at 1-800-ACS-2345 day or night.