Top Tips for Breast Cancer Prevention, Screening, Treatment and Survivorship

PREVENTION TIPS

For all women:
Follow a healthy lifestyle,
including keeping your weight in normal range
(body mass index under 25), being physically
active (at least 30 minutes a day of moderate-
intensity exercise), minimizing alcohol intake
(one drink a day or less), and don’t smoke.
Overweight, inactivity and alcohol all increase
risk for breast cancer, and smoking increases
risk in some women.

For young women:
Breast-feed your babies
for as long as possible.
Women who breast-feed their babies
for at least a year in total have a
reduced risk of developing
breast cancer.

For postmenopausal
women: Avoid hormone
replacement therapy.
Menopausal hormone therapy increases
risk for breast cancer. If you must take
hormones to manage menopausal
symptoms, avoid those that contain
progesterone and limit their use to less
than three years. “Bioidentical” hormones
and hormonal creams and gels are no safer
than prescription hormones and should
also be avoided.

For high-risk women: Consider
taking an estrogen-blocking drug.
Women with a family history of breast
cancer or who have had breast biopsies
or are over 60 should talk to their doctor
about the pros and cons of estrogen-
blocking drugs such as tamoxifen,
raloxifene, and aromatase inhibitors.

SCREENING AND EARLY
DETECTION TIPS

If you are over 40,
get a mammogram.
Early detection of breast cancer offers the
best chance for a cure. SCCA supports the
American Cancer Society’s recommendation
that women begin annual mammography
screening at age 40.

Know your risk.
Tell your doctor if you have family members
who have had breast cancer, especially a
mother or sister, and if they had breast
cancer before reaching menopause because
your own risk of cancer may be higher than
average. Some women at high risk may be
recommended for annual MRI in addition to
a screening mammogram.

Don’t put off screening because of
discomfort or fear of the results:
A mammogram should never be painful. To
reduce discomfort, try to schedule the exam
after your monthly period, when breast tissue
is less sensitive. You may benefit by taking
an over-the-counter anti-inflammatory
such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen
before your mammogram. Above all, tell
the mammography technologist about any
discomfort you may be experiencing. Most
abnormalities found after a mammogram
are not cancer. However, in some cases you
may be called back for more tests, such as
additional mammography or ultrasound
screening, to confirm that the area on the
screening mammogram is normal.
TREATMENT TIPS

Choose your doctor wisely.
Breast cancer specialists who work at dedicated cancer centers offer specific expertise as well as access to the latest treatments that are part of clinical studies. Such centers can provide other specialty services, usually under one roof, such as physical therapy, nutrition and social work.

Get specifics on your diagnosis and treatment.
To maximize your time with your providers, bring your questions with you in writing to your appointments. Ask for copies of your test results and keep a notebook of all these results. Keep a list of questions that arise between visits so you don’t forget, and take notes of the answers. Above all, make informed decisions; learn as much as you can about your diagnosis and treatment.

Get good nutrition and bone up on bone health.
Cancer treatment may influence taste and smell, and it may alter your digestion. Foods that you normally enjoy may not taste good during treatment while, paradoxically, foods that normally don’t appeal to you might taste better. You may have more energy and less nausea if you eat smaller amounts of foods more frequently rather than eating three big meals per day. Eat more vegetables, fruits, whole grains, nuts, seeds and legumes such as black beans and lentils. Choose a rainbow of colorful whole foods (like deep greens of spinach, deep blues of blueberries, white for onions, and so on) to ensure that you get a variety of anti-cancer nutrients. Alcohol is usually not preferred or recommended during treatment. Keeping your bones healthy throughout your life is important; however, if you’re a woman who’s been diagnosed with breast cancer, bone health is especially important. Research shows that some breast cancer treatments can lead to bone loss. Plus, women are about twice as likely as men to develop osteoporosis after age 50. Talk to your health care team about specific recommendations for keeping bones healthy, taking calcium and vitamin D, and appropriate weight-bearing exercises to help keep bones strong.

SURVIVOR TIPS

Get a summary of your treatments.
Have a list of what surgery, radiation and chemotherapy doses you received so that you can communicate these to your primary care providers. This will help you plan for the next tip on the list.

Make a plan for monitoring the long-term effects of your cancer treatment.
Talk to your doctor about the potential long-term effects of your cancer treatment and what to watch out for. For example, some cancer treatments can increase the risk of cardiovascular problems or second cancers; others can impact your bones.

Learn how to manage the fear of cancer coming back.
First, find out your risk of recurrence from your health care provider. Second, remember that risk is an estimate based on averages and does not always apply to you as an individual. Third, consider counseling or other assistance to help you face your fears and move forward.