

Elderly women: Risk Factors for Breast Cancer

Age — The older you are, the greater your chance of getting breast cancer. Experts believe that one in eight women who live to age 80 or more will get the disease.



About 77 percent of women are over age 50 at the time they are diagnosed with breast cancer; less than 1 percent are diagnosed in their 20s. When younger women — those who have not gone through menopause — get the disease, it may be a faster-growing breast cancer.

Elderly women forgo breast cancer detection and treatment for various beliefs and reasons such as, not needed at their age, its God's will, natural process of aging, never had a mammogram, and has other illnesses and fear of cancer and treatments.

Due to lower incomes, low Medicaid/Medicare insurance coverage and poverty, elderly women present with advanced, late stage cancers, fare worse outcomes, and reduced survival.

Family History — If you have a close blood relative — a mother, sister or daughter — who has had breast cancer, your own risk for developing the disease doubles. If two of these relatives have the disease, your risk increases five times. In many cases where breast cancer seems to run in families, a mutation in specific genes, called BRCA1 and BRCA2, may be contributing to the cancer.

Genetic tests are available to see if a woman carries this mutation. However, genetic testing is a complex area. If you have concerns about your family history, you should consult a doctor and a genetic counselor that can help you weigh the benefits and risks of testing.

Personal History of cancer, Previous breast cancer — A woman with a history of gynecological cancer or cancer in one breast has a three to four-fold increased risk of developing a new cancer in the other breast.