

Older Women and Breast Cancer



The older you are the greater your risk 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.

Sadly, some elderly women are diagnosed with later and advanced stage breast cancer and as a result experience poor treatment outcomes and reduced survival.

Some reasons older women neglect breast cancer detection and treatment are beliefs that mammograms are unnecessary; any breast changes are a natural process of aging, religious beliefs and overall fear of a possible cancer diagnosis and treatment. Older women experience less availability of healthcare resources, lower income and lack of insurance coverage are all barriers that impact elderly women access to early detection of cancer.

Older women are encouraged to discuss with their doctors if they have:

- an immediate family member(s) or close blood relative(s) who has a history of breast cancer as your own risk for developing the disease doubles
- a personal history of gynecological cancer or previous breast cancer, the risk increases three to four-fold of developing a new cancer in the other breast
- entered menopause later than age 55 have an increased risk likely due to increased exposure to estrogen

Any woman, regardless of age, who has a family history of cancer, particularly breast and ovarian, should bring it to the attention of her physician, who can evaluate potential breast cancer risk, the need for genetic testing, and the proper screening plan to follow.

Treatment options for older women may change depending on the stage and type of breast cancer and if she has other health issues. Many older women with breast cancer do not die from it.