

With Regular Screening, More Women Survive Breast Cancer

Getting regular mammograms is the most reliable way to detect breast cancer early.

October 6, 2023 By American Cancer Society

Breast cancer is most treatable when caught early. The breast cancer mortality rate has dropped 43% since 1989 because of earlier detection and improved treatments. That's why this October, to mark Breast Cancer Awareness Month, the [American Cancer Society](#) (ACS) highlights its guidelines encouraging average-risk women to begin regular screening mammograms at age 45, with the option to begin screening as early as age 40. Although the ACS has been leading the charge to end cancer through advocacy, research, and patient support, the greatest tool a woman has to protect themselves and their loved ones is regular screening. Getting regular mammograms, which are low-dose X-ray images of breasts, is the most reliable way to detect breast cancer early.

"Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women (after skin cancer) and the second most common cause of cancer mortality. Breast cancer screening with mammography is important because early detection saves lives," says [Dr. Robert Smith](#), senior vice president of early cancer detection science for the American Cancer Society. "Research has shown regular mammograms are associated with a substantially reduced risk of dying from breast cancer."

[American Cancer Society breast cancer guidelines](#), which are evidence-based and crafted by a panel of doctors and patient advocates, recommend that women between the ages of 40 and 44 should have the option to begin annual screening if they desire to do so, but by age 45 they should begin and continue annual screening until age 55 when they can transition to biennial screening, or if they prefer, continue annual screening. All women should speak with their doctor about breast cancer screening, as factors like family history, genetics, and lifestyle choices can influence when and how often someone should get screened. Also, all women should be familiar with how their breasts normally look and feel and should report any changes to a healthcare provider right away.

For women with an average breast cancer risk, the ACS recommends:

- Women 40 to 44 years old have the option to start screening with a mammogram every year.
- Women 45 to 54 years old should get mammograms every year.

- Women 55 years old and older can switch to a mammogram every other year, or they can choose to continue yearly mammograms.
- Women 75 years old or older, screening should continue as long as they are in good health and expected to live at least ten more years.

Women who are at high risk for breast cancer based on certain factors should get a [breast MRI](#) and a mammogram every year.

“Women who receive regular mammograms and are diagnosed with breast cancer are more likely to be diagnosed earlier, less likely to need aggressive treatments, and more likely to be cured,” said Smith. “Once a woman begins breast cancer screening, it is important that she commits to regular, on-time, examinations. Regular screening, rather than irregular or occasional screening, offers the greatest benefit.”

Learn more about breast cancer at cancer.org/BreastCancer.