

Digital Mammography Strengthens the Fight against Breast Cancer

Lifestyle factors have a big impact on a person's risk for cancer. Things like diet, exercise and routine health screenings influence the overall risk factors for various types of cancer. Those routine health screenings can make a significant difference, especially with breast cancer.

Only five to ten percent of women diagnosed with breast cancer had a family history. Most cases are sporadic, with no direct history. "This means that all women should have regular screenings for breast cancer whether or not they have a family history," said Betty Adams, BSRT (R) (M), mammography coordinator with West Calcasieu Cameron Hospital.

One's cancer risk is influenced by lifestyle factors more than geography or family history. According to the American Cancer Society, one in three people in the United States will be diagnosed with some form of cancer in their lifetime. This makes everyday choices more important than ever before. Choosing healthy foods and making time for regular exercise can help prevent many types of cancer; and getting recommended screenings can find cancer in the early stages, raising the survival odds considerably. More and more people today are cancer survivors thanks to the technology of early detection.

Mammograms are among the best early detection methods for breast cancer, giving valuable time for treatment. In fact, if detected early, the five year survival rate of breast cancer is over 96 percent. "But, the technology is useless if we don't use it," said Adams.

Recommended annually for women over the age of 40, evidence confirms a substantial benefit for women's health. According to the American Cancer Society, current evidence strongly supports mammography even more so than in the past. "It can detect lumps that are missed through self breast exams and even clinical exams, up to one or two years before the lumps can be felt by hand. That means you could have a head start on treatment two years before you would if you hadn't had a mammogram."

Digital mammogram technology, available at West Calcasieu Cameron Hospital, is able to detect breast cancer more easily than traditional film, especially in younger women or women with dense breast tissue because it provides a much clearer image in a shorter amount of time.

In addition to mammography, health experts recommend women do a regular self breast exam to notice any unusual lumps or changes in their breasts. "Most breasts are lumpy, but by doing self exams regularly, a woman will get to know her own breast health better and she'll know if there is a change," said Adams. Clinical exams are recommended every year for women over 40. "Putting these three screening tools together provide a good defense against breast cancer, when combined with a healthy lifestyle," she said.

Since more than 180,000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer this year and over 40,000 will die, Adams urges women to make time for a mammogram. "Research shows us that if women 50 and older would get regular mammograms, the mortality rate could decrease by 30%. That's 12,000 lives that could be saved with just a simple, twenty-minute screening."

West Calcasieu Cameron Hospital is one of the sponsors of the Fight Cancer with Facts educational campaign. To schedule a mammogram, call West Calcasieu Cameron Hospital's radiology department at (337) 527-4256.