

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month



According to the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women's website, Massachusetts has the highest incidence of women diagnosed with breast cancer in the country. When breast cancer is diagnosed in its' earliest stage there is a 98%, five year survival rate. Early detection and education are key.

The following are just a few frequently asked questions:

1. What is breast cancer?

Breast cancer is a disease in which malignant cancer cells form in the tissues of the breast. Survival rates are very high among those diagnosed early. There are numerous resources available to support women with breast cancer. Women in the United States get breast cancer more than any other type of cancer except for skin cancer.

2. How often should I do a self exam?

Give yourself a breast exam at least once a month. Look for any changes in breast tissue, such as changes in size, a lump, dimpling or puckering of the breast or discharge from a nipple. If you discovery any of the above, you should see a physician immediately. But do not panic! Eight of ten lumps are benign.

3. Does a family history of breast cancer put someone at higher risk?

If you have a grandmother, mother, sister or daughter who has been diagnosed with breast cancer, this does put you in a higher risk category. Have a baseline mammogram at least five years before the age of breast cancer onset in a close relative or starting at age 35.

4. Does smoking cause breast cancer?

There is no evidence that conclusively links smoking to breast cancer. However, due to the number of health risks associated with smoking, quitting can increase survival rates significantly.

5. Is there a link between oral contraceptives and breast cancer?

There is an increased risk of breast cancer for women under 35 who have been using birth control pills for more than ten years.

6. Where can I receive support if I have been diagnosed with breast cancer?

There are numerous agencies in Western Massachusetts that offer support to men and women who have been diagnosed with breast cancer. Here are just a few of them....

-The Cancer Connection, Florence, Massachusetts; 586-1642; <http://www.cancer-connection.org/links>

-The Cooley Dickinson Hospital in Northampton, Massachusetts offers medical care and support groups. 413-582-2000; <http://www.cooley-dickinson.org/services/cancer-care>

-The local chapter for the American Cancer Society is located in Holyoke, Massachusetts; 59 Bobala Rd, 413-734-6000

(Resource: the National Breast Cancer Foundation)