

## October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Level Up will be providing you with a variety of resources and information throughout this Breast Cancer Awareness month.

### What is breast cancer?

Breast cancer is when abnormal cells grow in 1 or both breasts and develop a mass called a malignant tumor. Those cancer cells can then spread to lymph nodes and other parts of the body.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in American women, after skin cancer.

### What are the causes of breast cancer?

Breast cancer causes are unknown, but there are some risk factors (such as **being overweight** and **lack of physical activity**) that may increase the chances of getting breast cancer.

However, these risk factors are not always the best indicator of whether someone will get the disease.

### Who's at higher risk?

Breast cancer is most common in women over age 50. But some women have a high risk for getting breast cancer, even at a younger age. About 11% of all new cases of breast cancer in the United States are in women younger than age 45. The following factors increase the risk of getting breast cancer at a young age:

- You have close relatives who were diagnosed with breast cancer before age 45.
- You have close relatives diagnosed with ovarian cancer at any age.
- You carry a high-risk breast cancer gene (BRCA1 or BRCA2).
- You had radiation therapy to the chest or breast during childhood or early adulthood.
- You've had breast cancer or other breast health problems.
- You've been told you have dense breast tissue on a mammogram.

### What are some common breast cancer symptoms?

- **Change in way the breast feels:** The most common symptom of breast cancer is a painless lump or thickening of the breast.
- **Change in the way the breast looks:** Skin may look different, or you may see a change in size or shape.
- **Change in the nipple:** It may turn in or the skin around it becomes scaly.
- **Fluid comes out of the nipple** (other than breast milk).

### How is breast cancer diagnosed?

The following types of breast cancer screening can help doctors diagnose breast cancer:

- You can sometimes detect lumps through breast self-exams.
- Your primary care doctor can check for lumps during your physical exams.
- Your doctor can also refer you to get a mammogram—an x-ray of the breast that can find smaller lumps that may be undetectable by touch. If a lump or other change is detected, the doctor will take sample of cells in the breast—this is a biopsy. Results of the biopsy can determine whether cells are cancerous.

### What is the treatment for breast cancer?

Breast cancer treatment options are based on:

- Type and stage of the cancer

- Chances that the type of treatment will cure the cancer or help
- Your age
- Other health problems
- Feelings about side effects for certain treatments

Do you have concerns about your family history and breast cancer risk? Be sure to speak with your doctor.

## Additional Resources

- [Cigna](#) members
- [Kaiser Permanente](#) members
- [American Cancer Society](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control & Prevention](#)

**Office of Human Resources Management**  
**Level Up – Employee Wellness Program**  
1400 McCormick Drive, Suite 351  
Largo, MD 20774  
[LevelUp@co.pg.md.us](mailto:LevelUp@co.pg.md.us)

