

Empowering Lives Through Breast Cancer Awareness

In October, the nation stands together for Breast Cancer Awareness Month by driving awareness, honoring strength, and advancing the fight for a cure.

Breast cancer starts when some cells in the breast grow out of control and form a lump, called a tumor. These cells can spread into nearby tissues or other parts of the body. Most breast cancers begin in the ducts or lobules of the breast, but they can start anywhere in the breast. Each type of breast cancer is different, and this helps doctors decide the best treatment.

Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death among women in the United States. From 2017 to 2021, about 132 out of every 100,000 women were diagnosed with breast cancer across the country. In Louisiana, the rates are similar, with about 130 out of every 100,000 women getting breast cancer.

Catching breast cancer early is important. Most people find it through regular screening. Mammograms are the best way to spot tumors before you notice any symptoms. If something looks unusual, other tests like ultrasound, MRI, or a biopsy can help doctors check if the cells are cancerous. People who have a higher risk for breast cancer may need to start screening sooner or get checked more often.

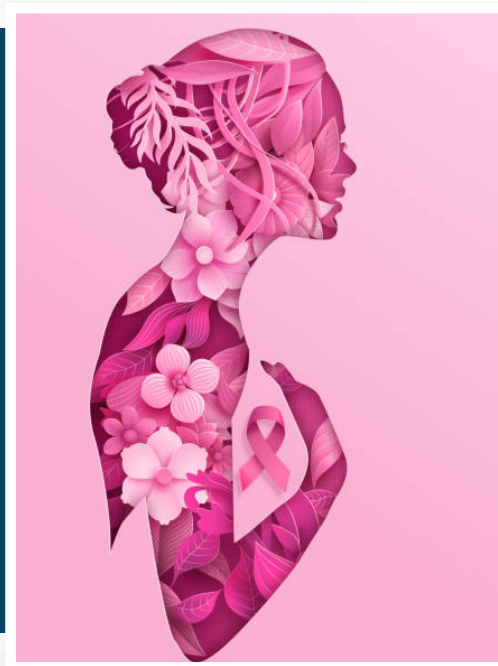
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Breast Cancer Risk Factors and Who's Affected

Your risk for breast cancer can be affected by your genes, age, and lifestyle. Family history, certain gene changes like BRCA1 or BRCA2, and getting older all raise your chance. Hormones, being overweight, drinking alcohol, and not staying active can also play a role. Knowing your risks helps you make smart choices about your health and be proactive about care.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among women in the United States, affecting all racial and ethnic groups. However, Black women are more likely to be diagnosed when the disease is further along and face higher rates of death compared to White women. Most diagnoses occur between ages 55 and 74, with a median age of 63.

Men are also at risk, accounting for roughly 1 percent of breast cancer cases in the U.S. In 2025, an estimated 2,800 men will be diagnosed and about 510 will die from the disease, with a lifetime risk of approximately 1 in 726. Awareness is critical, as symptoms in men often go unrecognized.



Navigating Breast Cancer: Support, Treatment, and Survival

Being diagnosed with breast cancer can feel overwhelming, but taking the first step by working with a trusted healthcare team helps patients understand the stage, type, and treatment options. Getting a second opinion can give reassurance. Loved ones can help by offering rides to appointments, preparing meals, or simply being there to listen, making the journey less lonely. Support groups and advocacy networks connect patients and survivors, sharing experiences and encouragement.

Treatment for breast cancer varies for each person and may include surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, hormone therapy, targeted therapy, or immunotherapy. Recent research has made treatments more personalized, often with fewer side effects. Healthcare providers explain the benefits and risks of each option. Because of improved screening and treatment, survival rates have increased. When breast cancer is found early and has not spread, the national five-year survival rate is about 99 percent.

Throughout the year, especially in October, people raise awareness, support survivors, remember those who have passed away, and continue to hope for a future without breast cancer.

From Diagnosis to Determination: Inspiring Insights to Empower Your Journey

Deborah Grimes, Sr. VP-Chief Health Outcomes & Inclusion Officer, Ochsner Health

Fifteen years ago, I heard the words no one ever expects, you have breast cancer. There wasn't much time to process what it meant. The moment I was diagnosed, I had to begin moving forward. It marked the beginning of my journey filled with challenges, unexpected strength, and deep gratitude.

I discovered the lump during a self-breast exam. That moment changed everything. It reminded me how important it is to know your body and trust your instincts. You are your first line of defense. When something feels different, don't ignore it. Reaching out to a primary care physician you trust can help guide you through the next steps. Together, you can decide what tests are needed, and if necessary, begin treatment early, and that can make all the difference.

At the time, I was working in healthcare administration as an attorney. I am also a labor and delivery nurse by training. Even with all my experience, I had to allow myself to become the patient and to be cared for. That shift taught me how vital it is to separate what you do from who you are. Healing requires presence and acceptance.

My diagnosis was triple negative breast cancer. My treatment included 24 rounds of chemotherapy, a lumpectomy following chemo, and 37 rounds of radiation. It was intense, but I found strength in staying connected to the things that made me feel whole. Life continued, and the continuity gave me renewed power. I continued to work, missing just one day. I went to church every Sunday, attended my children's games, and leaned on the love of my husband and family. This sense of normalcy helped the nine months of treatment feel manageable.

That said, everyone's journey looks different. Some may need to step away from work or daily obligations to focus entirely on rest and recovery, and that's perfectly okay. What matters most is making choices that support your wellbeing and feel right for you.

Here are a few things I've learned that I hope will help others:

1. **Pay attention to your body.** Noticing a change and speaking up allows you to seek care sooner.
2. **Build trust with a provider who listens and supports you.** They are your partners on your care journey.
3. **Follow the plan.** It's normal to be fearful, but your healthcare team is there to guide you through every stage. Trust the process.

Living through breast cancer was far from easy, but it brought clarity and a deeper commitment to walking alongside others on their own paths. If you are just starting out, hold onto this truth: there is hope, and your diagnosis is just one part of the story. There is life during treatment, and life after. There is still room for joy, connection, and healing, even during the hardest moments. Keep showing up, in whatever way you can. Trust your instincts, lean into your support system, and give yourself permission to move forward at your own pace. You are capable and resilient, and most importantly, you are never alone on this journey.

Cancer is the best-kept family secret

But silence can make the journey lonelier for everyone. Talking about it — and knowing your family history — can save lives.

When you open up, you invite love, strength, and support.

Sharing doesn't make cancer worse; it makes it lighter. Connection is part of healing.



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