

It's Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Do you know how to perform a breast self-exam? October is a month that is known for pumpkin picking, hayrides, and beautiful fall foliage. The month is also synonymous with breast cancer awareness and features walks, fundraisers, and nationwide camaraderie to raise awareness, as well as funds, to beat the disease. "This cause is as important as ever with approximately one in eight women in the United States developing invasive breast cancer during her lifetime," explains Laura Klein, M.D., medical director, The Valley Hospital Breast Center.

However, we need to remain aware of this disease throughout the year and advocate for ourselves, and our health, by performing regular breast self-exams. Tihesha Wilson, assistant medical director, The Valley Hospital Breast Center, says that "The idea of performing a breast self-exam can be uncomfortable, but, once you get used to the few simple steps, it will become second nature to you!"

The first step to properly performing a breast self-exam is for you to become familiar with your body so that you can be cognizant of any changes that may occur. If possible, you should also try to perform the exam at the same time each month.

According to the National Breast Cancer Foundation, there are 3 ways to perform a self-exam:

1. In the shower: Using the pads of your fingers, move around your entire breast in a circular pattern moving from the outside to the center, checking the entire breast

and armpit area. Check both breasts each month feeling for any lump, thickening, or hardened knot. Notice any changes and get lumps evaluated by your health-care provider.

2. In front of a mirror: Visually inspect your breasts with your arms at your sides. Next, raise your arms high overhead. Look for any changes in the contour, any swelling, or dimpling of the skin, or changes in the nipples. Next, rest your palms on your hips and press firmly to flex your chest muscles. Left and right breasts will not exactly match – few women's breasts do, so look for any dimpling, puckering, or changes, particularly on one side.

3. Lying down: When lying down, the breast tissue spreads out evenly along the chest wall. Place a pillow under your right shoulder and your right arm behind your head. Using your left hand, move the pads of your fingers around your right breast gently in small circular motions covering the entire breast area and armpit. Use light, medium, and firm pressure. Squeeze the nipple; check for discharge and lumps. Repeat these steps for your left breast.

The Foundation also lists a series of potential signs of breast cancer:

1. A change in how the breast or nipple feels
2. A change in the breast or nipple appearance
3. Any nipple discharge – particularly clear discharge or bloody discharge

If you have any concerns about your breast health,



Walks and fundraisers raise breast cancer awareness.

you should contact your physician as soon as possible. The Valley Breast Center provides comprehensive breast health services by a multidisciplinary team of experienced physicians, physician assistants, nurses, technologists, and other support professionals who work together to coordinate all aspects of a woman's breast care.

The center recently expanded and enhanced services with the addition of a second breast imaging location at the Robert and Audrey Luckow Pavilion in Paramus. This new location, along with the original one at The Valley Hospital in Ridgewood, increases the number of patients who can be served by the center and improves patient access to same-day diagnostic mammograms, fine needle aspirations, or core biopsies.

If you wish to make a mammogram or bone density appointment, call (201) 447-8600.

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