

The Healthcare Consortium

For Your Health

“This Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Learn the Signs and Schedule Your Screenings”

Sydney Keiler, Director of Development and Communications

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, a time to raise awareness about a disease that affects thousands of New Yorkers and their families every year. Breast cancer is one of the most common cancers among women in New York State, where approximately 16,700 women are diagnosed, and about 2,500 women lose their lives to the disease each year. While less common, men can also develop breast cancer, with about 160 men diagnosed in New York each year.

The exact causes of breast cancer are not fully understood, but research shows that certain factors can increase risk. These include age, family history, genetic mutations such as BRCA, personal history of cancer, hormonal factors, and not breastfeeding. Lifestyle choices also play a role; for instance, excessive alcohol use, lack of exercise, and exposure to ionizing radiation can all contribute to higher risk.

In addition to knowing the risk factors, it's equally important to recognize the signs of breast cancer. The National Breast Cancer Foundation highlights some common warning signs of breast cancer, including a lump or thickening in or near the breast or underarm, changes in breast size, shape, or texture such as dimpling or swelling, nipple inversion or tenderness, and skin changes such as redness, scaliness, or a texture similar to an orange peel. Any nipple discharge, especially if it is clear or bloody, should also be discussed with your doctor.

Early detection remains one of the most effective ways to improve breast cancer outcomes. It is recommended for women over 40 to receive yearly mammograms, and everyone to perform monthly breast self-exams to become familiar with how their breasts normally look and feel. A breast self-exam involves both looking at and feeling your breasts to detect changes. Any unusual findings should be reported to a healthcare provider right away. While self-exams are an important tool, they do not replace regular mammograms or clinical breast exams performed by a medical professional.

According to the American Cancer Society, women at average risk should begin screening between the ages of 40 and 44. Women ages 45 to 54 should receive mammograms every year, and those 55 and older can continue yearly or switch to every other year. Screening should continue as long as a woman is in good health and expected to live at least ten more years.

For Columbia and Greene Counties, the Cancer Services Program of the Greater Capital Region offers no-cost breast cancer screenings for individuals ages 40 to 64. These services are funded by New York State and provided by credentialed healthcare providers across the region. Eligible participants must live in New York State, be uninsured or underinsured, meet income guidelines, and meet age requirements. Available screenings include

a clinical breast exam and mammogram for those 40 and older or under 40 if at high risk. To learn more or determine eligibility, call 518-525-8680 or visit www.sphp.com/services/cancer/cancer-screenings-support-services/cancer-services-program

This October and beyond, take time to learn your risk factors, schedule your screenings, and encourage loved ones to do the same because early detection really does save lives.

The Healthcare Consortium is a non-profit organization with a mission of improving access to healthcare and supporting the health and well-being of the residents in our rural community. The agency is located at 325 Columbia St. in Hudson. For more information: visit www.columbiahealthnet.org or call 518-822-8820.