As the national breast cancer awareness month, October, approaches, it’s time to learn some facts to protect ourselves from breast cancer.

According to the American Cancer Society in 2013, approximately 232,340 new cases of invasive breast cancer are expected to be diagnosed among women in the US and about 2,240 among men.

Non-modifiable risk factors

1. Gender (women are at increased risk)
2. Increasing age
3. Family history
4. Defects in genes (BRCA1 and BRCA2)
5. Race (increased risk in Caucasian women and African American women)
6. Early menstruation (before age 12)
7. Late menopause (after 55)
8. Dense breast tissue
9. Exposure to chest radiation during adolescence

Modifiable risk factors

1. Late pregnancy (after age 30)
2. Oral contraceptives (risk goes away after stopping the oral contraceptives)
3. Combined estrogen and progesterone postmenopausal hormone replacement therapy (recent and current users)
4. Estrogen therapy (for more than 10 years)
5. Alcohol consumption
6. Overweight
7. Physical inactivity (sedentary lifestyle)

Signs and symptoms

1. Swelling or new lumps in the breast
2. Any changes in the size, shape, color, or texture of the breast
3. Breast or nipple pain
4. Unusual discharges
5. Skin irritation
6. Any area that appears unique from other areas on the breast

Importance of early screenings

The main goal of early screenings is to increase survival rate by detecting breast cancer before symptoms start to occur.

Screening tests used to detect breast cancer are the breast self-exam, clinical breast exam, mammogram (x-ray of breast), MRI, and ultrasound.

American Cancer Society recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Mammogram</th>
<th>Clinical breast exam (CBE) by healthcare professionals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20’s</td>
<td>Every 3 years</td>
<td>Every 3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30’s</td>
<td>Every 3 years</td>
<td>Every 3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥40</td>
<td>Every year</td>
<td>Every year except if the patient has a serious, chronic health problem such as congestive heart failure</td>
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</tbody>
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In addition, starting at age 20 every woman should perform a breast self-exam (BSE) at least once a month to identify unusual changes.

Healthy lifestyle choices which decrease the risk of getting breast cancer include maintaining a healthy weight by exercising, avoiding late pregnancies, breast feeding if possible, decreasing alcohol consumption (≤1 drink per day), and limiting post-menopausal therapy.