



**According to Sitemna
Cancer Institute,
whether incarcerated
or not, women and
men should consider
eight simple steps to
help reduce the risk
of breast cancer**



During the month of October women all over the world were asked to wear pink and bring awareness to breast cancer, its' cause, prevention, diagnosis, treatment and cure. The American Cancer Society and the pharmaceutical company now known as AstraZeneca (maker of several anti-breast cancer drugs) established Breast Cancer Awareness Month and its accompanying pink ribbon in 1985.

The World Health(WHO) estimates that about 1.38 million new cases and 458 000 deaths from breast cancer occur annually. Unfortunately, there are not sufficient knowledge on the causes of breast cancer, therefore, early detection of the disease is the key to combat this chronic disease. When breast cancer is detected early, and if adequate diagnosis and treatment are available, there is a good chance that breast cancer can be cured.

Over the past 20 years, the number of women held in state and federal prisons has increased more than six-times. Two thirds of women confined to local jails and state and federal prisons are black, Hispanic, or members of other non-white ethnic groups. Additionally, the majority of women in jail come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, have limited education, and have experienced inadequate and inconsistent health care prior to incarceration. Therefore, like women everyone, those women whom are incarcerated must also empowered by acquiring tools needed to "Take Charge" by increasing their knowledge of breast health information, intention to receive a clinical breast exam or mammogram, confidence in knowing when to get a clinical breast exam or mammogram, ability to identify any normal or abnormal changes in the breast, and confidence in taking steps to reduce risk of breast cancer.

According to Sitemna Cancer Institute, whether incarcerated or not, women and men should consider eight simple steps to help reduce the risk of breast cancer.

1. Keep Weight in Check

It's easy to tune out because it gets said so often, but maintaining a healthy weight is an important goal for everyone. Being overweight can increase the risk of many different cancers, including breast cancer, especially after menopause.

2. Be Physically Active

Exercise is important to overall health and wellness. Women who are physically active for at least 30 minutes a day have a lower risk of breast cancer. Regular exercise is also one of the best ways to help keep weight in check.

3. Eat Your Fruits & Vegetables – and Avoid the Use of Alcohol

A healthy diet can help lower the risk of breast cancer. Try to eat a plenty fruits and vegetables and avoid the use of alcohol.

4. Don't Smoke

Smokers and non-smokers alike know how unhealthy smoking is as it relates to overall health. It lowers the quality of life and increasing the risk of heart disease, stroke, and at least 15 cancers – including breast cancer – it also causes bad breath, bad teeth, and wrinkles.

5. Breastfeed, If Possible

Breastfeeding for a total of one year or more (combined for all children) lowers the risk of breast cancer. It also has great health benefits for the child.

6. Avoid Birth Control Pills, Particularly After Age 35 or If You Smoke

Birth control pills have both risks and benefits. The younger a woman is, the lower the risks are. While women are taking birth control pills, they have a slightly increased risk of breast cancer. This risk goes away quickly, though, after stopping the pill. The risk of stroke and heart attack is also increased while on the pill – particularly if a woman smokes. However, long-term use can also have important benefits, like lowering the risk of ovarian cancer, colon cancer and uterine cancer – not to mention unwanted pregnancy – so there's also a lot in its favor. If you're very concerned about breast cancer, avoiding birth control pills is one option to lower risk.

7. Find Out Your Family History

Women with a strong family history of cancer can take special steps to protect themselves, so it's important for women to know their family history. You may be at high risk of breast cancer if you have a mother or sister who developed breast or ovarian cancer (especially at an early age) or if you have multiple family members (including males) who developed breast, ovarian or prostate cancer. A doctor or genetic counselor can help you understand your family history of the disease.

8. Don't Forget Screening

Despite some controversy, studies show that breast cancer screening with mammography saves lives. It doesn't help prevent cancer, but it can help find cancer early when it's most treatable. For most women, regular mammograms can begin at age 40, but specific recommendations vary by age and risk.

- If you are age 40 – 44:
 - You can choose to begin yearly mammograms. It is important to talk to a doctor about the risk and benefits of mammograms at these ages.
- If you are age 45 – 54:
 - Mammograms are recommended every year.
- If you are age 55 or over:
 - Mammograms are recommended every other year. You can choose to continue to have them every year.

- Clinical breast exams and self-exams are not recommended. But you should be familiar with your breasts and tell a health care provider right away if you notice any changes in how your breasts look or feel.

Other Important Risk Factors for Breast Cancer (Men and Women)

Unfortunately, there are also a number of important breast cancer risk factors that women and men have no control over. Knowing which ones apply to you can help you understand your risk and do what you can to lower it. If you feel you're at high risk, talk to a doctor or other health professional. These can increase a woman's breast cancer risk:

- Older age, especially 50 years or over
- Family history of breast cancer
- First menstrual period (menarche) before age 12
- Menopause at age 55 or over
- First childbirth after age 35
- No children
- Tall height (5'8" or taller)
- Dense breasts
- History of benign breast disease (like atypical hyperplasia)
- Aging
- Liver disease among men
- Estrogen treatment among men
- Obesity among men

As the month of October came to a close, let's take the time to not empower our family, friends, and colleagues, about the importance of early detection and screening, but also to share that information with both male and female detainees/inmates. This small but relevant action could possible save a life. In support of the year's theme, lets' *'Give Hope, Save Lives'* Dr. Celia Victor, PharmD /Health Services Administrator