

# Tips for Women with Disabilities on Understanding Breast Cancer

Breast Cancer Awareness

Risk Factors for Breast Cancer

Clinical Breast Exams and Screening

Mammograms and Screening

Breast Cancer Diagnosis

Breast Cancer Treatments and Side Effects

Care During and After Breast Cancer Treatment

Insurance Coverage for Mammography

Additional copies of tip card packets  
are available at  
[www.aahd.us](http://www.aahd.us)

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## **Dear Friend:**

Women often do not find time to take care of themselves. Women with disabilities face extra challenges--some lack time to attend to their routine physical health in addition to their disability. Or they may think "I won't get breast cancer because lightning can't strike twice."

Women with disabilities are as likely and sometimes more likely to get breast cancer as the general population due to having more risk factors than women in general. Because there's no sure way to prevent breast cancer, it's important to take care of yourself by having regular screenings to find breast cancer early, when breast cancers often respond well to treatment, and the chance for survival is high. These tip cards stress the importance of early screening and give recommendations for you to follow. Also covered are diagnosis, treatment issues, and insurance coverage.

We hope this guide will inspire you to take charge of your breast health and be a self advocate. Getting early breast cancer screening can save your life!

# Women with Disabilities and Breast Cancer Awareness and Screening

- ❖ Susan G. Komen for the Cure® reports that breast cancer is the most common cancer among American women, except for skin cancers.
- ❖ Women with disabilities are as likely to get breast cancer as the general population.
- ❖ Women with disabilities, including African-American and Hispanic/Latina women are less likely to get regular clinical breast exams (when a health care provider looks at and feels your breasts) and mammograms (x-rays of the breasts), which increases their chances of being diagnosed with larger tumors and more advanced tumors.
- ❖ Be sure to get screened and speak with your doctor about which tests are right for you.
- ❖ Have a mammogram every year starting at age 40, if you are at average risk.
- ❖ Have a clinical breast exam at least every 3 years starting at age 20, and every year starting at age 40.
- ❖ Know your risk, learn about your family history and talk to your health care professionals about your personal risk of breast cancer.

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- ❖ Knowing what is normal for you will help you know when something has changed. If you notice any changes in your breasts, make an appointment with your health care provider right away.
  - ❖ Make healthy lifestyle choices (keep a healthy weight, limit alcohol intake, limit post-menopausal hormone use and breastfeed, if you can).
  - ❖ Early detection can save your life.
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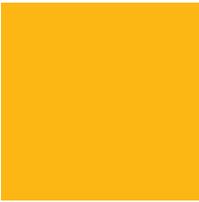
# Women with Disabilities and Risk Factors for Breast Cancer

- ❖ Risk factors are things that can put you at high risk of breast cancer. If you have one or more of the following risk factors for developing breast cancer, as many women with disabilities do, talk to your health care provider about getting screened earlier and/or more often than recommended for women without risk factors:
  - Gender--being female is biggest risk factor.
  - Age--risk increases as you get older—this is second biggest risk factor.
  - Family History--breast cancer risk is higher among women whose mother, sister, or daughter has had this disease.
  - Personal History--a woman with cancer in one breast has increased risk of developing new cancer in other breast or in another part of same breast.
  - Previous Chest Radiation--Women who received chest radiation as treatment for another cancer or disability are at significantly increased risk for breast cancer.

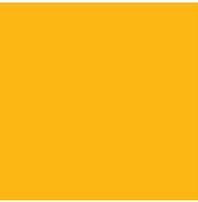
- Having had no children or first child after 30--slightly higher breast cancer risk.
- Alcohol--linked to increased risk of developing breast cancer.
- Being overweight or obese—may increase breast cancer risk, especially after menopause.
- Hormone therapy after menopause.
- Smoking—has been linked to breast cancer.

# Women with Disabilities and Clinical Breast Exams

- ❖ A clinical breast exam (CBE) is a physical exam done by a health care provider, who looks at your breasts and underarms and feels them while you are sitting up and then lying down.
- ❖ The CBE should be done as part of your regular checkup. If it is not offered by your health care provider, you should ask how often you should be getting one.
- ❖ Susan G. Komen for the Cure® Recommendations for Clinical Breast Exams:
  - Start at age 20.
  - Ages 20 – 39 and no risk factors: at least every 3 years.
  - 40 and older: every year.
  - If a health care provider has told you that you have other risk factors, follow his or her advice on how often to have clinical exams.



❖ If you have difficulty getting a clinical breast exam:

- Have your spouse, family member, friend, or caregiver come with you to give you physical and/or mental support.
  - Tell your health care provider what makes you uncomfortable and what makes an exam more comfortable for you.
  - Ask for help from your health care provider.
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# Women with Disabilities and Mammograms

- ❖ A mammogram is an X-ray that makes an image of the breast in order to find signs of breast cancer.
- ❖ Mammograms use very little radiation and can detect very small tumors that can't be felt during a breast self exam or even a clinical exam.
- ❖ Susan G. Komen for the Cure® Recommendations for Mammograms:
  - Start at age 40.
  - Have a mammogram every year.
  - If a health care provider has told you that you have other risk factors, follow his or her advice on how often to have a mammogram.
- ❖ When calling to schedule a mammogram, tell staff about your disability and if you:
  - Use a walker, cane, wheelchair, or scooter.
  - Need help completing forms, dressing, positioning, sitting up, standing, moving your arms, and/or moving from your wheelchair or scooter to a chair if needed.