

## To Your Health!

By Judy Hargis, P.A., and Audeen Wagner



### What You Need to Know About Breast Health

Medical information and recommendations are constantly changing. Studies come out and advise us to reconsider what we have been told only to be challenged by yet another study which tells us we were on the right track to begin with. The major networks do not help as reporters only relay specific pieces of information that do not tell the "whole" story. That brings me to the

issue of Breast Health with all of its controversies.

Breast cancer is a subject of fear and anxiety for many women. We are told 1 out of 8 women will develop breast cancer in their lifetime. Most women believe that the 1 out of 8 statistics refers to women of all ages. Very few women are informed that risk increases with age and that younger women have a lower risk. More than 75 percent of newly diagnosed breast cancers occur in women over 50. Many women believe that breast cancer risk is greatest if they have a family history. It is important to know that 3/4 of women diagnosed with breast cancer have no other risk factors than age and gender. Both paternal and maternal family histories of breast cancer are important, but they are not the only contributing factors in breast cancer risk.

Early detection is extremely important. It allows for more treatment options and a better prognosis. A diagnosis of breast cancer will be made in nearly 150,000 women in the United States this year. Breast cancer is the most commonly reported cancer in Oregon. For many years women have been advised to do Breast Self-Examinations (BSE), but generally have not been educated on how to do them proficiently and consistently. Women often rely on mammograms as the most important test for early detection, but are unaware that approximately 15 percent of breast cancers are missed with mammography. That brings us to the Clinical Breast Examinations. These examinations are generally performed at Well Women Examinations and when women find a "lump" or change in their breast that they are con-

cerned about. Clinical breast examinations are a very important tool in the early detection of breast cancer.

In 2004, the American Cancer Society (ACS) and U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC) consensus panel published recommendations for Best Practice Guidelines for performing clinical breast examinations in order to improve care. The clinical breast examination can be a very important tool in finding early breast cancers. Unfortunately, clinical breast examinations vary as widely as the providers performing them. This is due in part to lack of clearly defined standards and guidelines like those for PAP smears and mammograms.

A satisfactory clinical breast examination should take three minutes per breast longer for larger breasts. The area examined should be adequate to exam all breast tissue. Lymph nodes above and below the clavicle, as well as in the axilla (arm pit) should be examined. Pressure should be deep enough to palpate the chest wall and the patient should be positioned so that the breast being examined is centered on the chest. The best time for a Clinical Breast Examination is on day 5-10 of the menstrual cycle. Women's hormones fluctuate throughout the cycle and doing the examination at this time minimizes nodularity and discomfort. It also makes for a more productive examination for both provider and the patient.

The most important thing is to be aware and talk to your healthcare provider about clinical breast examination. Learn how to do breast self-examinations as a means to familiarize yourself with the landscape of your breasts. If something feels different, have your healthcare provider check it out. Legislation has recently been passed in Oregon requiring insurance companies to cover appointments for clinical breast examinations. This can be a separate appointment from your annual Well Woman Examination and there does not need to be a breast concern for it to be covered. This is a great opportunity for you to get a thorough breast examination and education about breast health issues.

If you have questions, or would like information on breast self-examinations, clinical breast examinations or mammograms, please e-mail us at [health@the-independent.net](mailto:health@the-independent.net). We will be happy to send the information to you. For information on clinical breast exams that you can get from the internet, go to [www.mammocare.org](http://www.mammocare.org) and [www.ohsucancer.com](http://www.ohsucancer.com).

Remember, education and knowledge are your best defense in the early detection of breast cancer.

## Summer is a great time for seniors to start an exercise program

Only about 40% of seniors are engaged in regular leisure time exercise. Too bad, because exercise is really valuable: it will help you live longer, decrease risk of heart attack by 50%, lower "bad" cholesterol, increase endurance and reduce body fat. It will also re-

duce risk of diabetes and increase muscle mass and is considered relatively safe and low-risk.

So what to do to get started? If you've been sedentary, you may want to begin by engaging in "lifestyle activities," such as walking up stairs, gardening,

housecleaning, and other physical tasks that can be incorporated into everyday life. Studies have shown that benefits derived by becoming more active throughout the day are similar to those obtained through a structured exercise routine.

Other benefits of exercise include these:

- Increased strength.
- Increased activity levels.
- Elevated mood.

If you want to start an exercise program, the first stop

should be your health care provider's office. Make sure that you have no serious problems that would require you to go very slowly at first. Then ask for your provider's guidance in starting out.

Researchers have developed and tested a variety of new evidence-based programs for physical activity, several of which have produced significant measurable health benefits. One of these, EnhanceFitness, is available in Washington County.

This exercise program helps older adults at all levels of fitness become more active, energized, and empowered to sustain independent lives.

Based on solid research and tested at over 80 sites around the country, EnhanceFitness focuses on stretching, flexibility, balance, low impact aerobics, and strength training exercises—everything health professionals say that people need to maintain health and function as they grow older.

EnhanceFitness is offered without charge at North Plains Senior Center, 31450 NW Commercial St., Mon-Wed-Fri at 9:30 a.m., and at Tigard Senior Center, 8815 SW O'Mara, Mon-Wed-Fri at 8:45 a.m. and again at 10 a.m.

Other senior centers offer a wide variety of popular exercise

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