

Lumps and bumps don't always mean cancer

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Breast cancer is a pervasive, highly publicized and very personal disease. Most everyone has a mother, sister, relative or friend who has had a brush with breast cancer — a scare, a survival story, or the memory of a loved one who succumbed to it.

According to the American Cancer Society, breast cancer is the second most common cancer among women, other than skin cancer. It's estimated that more than 192,000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer during 2009.

Regular clinical breast exams and mammograms are the first line of defense for all adult women to monitor their breast health and follow up on any changes that their doctor may notice, such as lumps, bumps, pain and tenderness, or unusual discharge. Certain changes in the breast tissue are normal and more common as women age, but any unusual symptoms should be shared with your doctor to make sure they are not cancer. Though the value and diagnostic capabilities of breast self-exams (BSE) have been debated both in health care circles and the media, it's agreed that a thorough knowledge of the normal look and feel of one's breasts can help detect any obvious changes.

Research from the Mayo Clinic states that eight of every 10 breast lumps are not cancerous. And, according to the American Cancer Society, the most common physical changes in the breasts — lumps, tenderness or discharge — are usually linked to benign conditions, i.e., conditions that do not lead to cancer.

The most common diagnoses related to a breast lump, says the ACS, include fibroadenoma (a benign solid tumor), fibrocystic changes (benign breast changes), atypical hyperplasia (fast-growing abnormal cells), cysts (benign, fluid-filled sacs), or non-invasive cancers, such as ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS) — a cancer of the milk ducts.

A lump or cyst may be detected by a woman during a BSE or by her doctor during a clinical exam. A lump that is also tender and warm to the touch is likely a breast infection. A cyst is a round or an oval mass, can move when touched, and is full of fluid. Found in about one in three women between ages 35 and 50, cysts are diagnosed by a breast ultrasound or biopsy.

Other breast changes are not visible to the eye and show up during a mammogram, an X-ray that takes a picture of the breast tissue and can detect tumors before they are big enough for your doctor to feel. Beginning at age 40, women should have a screening mammogram once a year — and more often if there is a genetic predisposition toward breast cancer or a breast condition that warrants close follow-up.

A call from your doctor after a mammogram can be a worrisome experience. In most cases, the area in question turns out to be benign. About one in 10 women who get a mammogram will need more pictures taken — but most of these are not malignant or cancerous. Only two to four of every 1,000 mammograms lead to a diagnosis of cancer, according to the ACS.

Common mammogram findings include calcifications, a mass, fibrosis or lipoma. Some of these conditions can indicate the possibility of cancer, and others are completely benign. Your

physician will recommend further testing, if needed. Calcifications — tiny mineral deposits in the breast tissue — show up as white flecks on your mammogram film. There are two types: macrocalcifications, which are larger deposits generally caused by aging, injury or inflammation; and microcalcifications, tiny specs of calcium in the breast tissue, scattered or in clusters. The pattern and number of these deposits will help your doctor make a determination about whether cancer is present.

A mass may or may not be cancerous. The size, shape and borders of a mass help to define whether it is benign or malignant. Fibrosis refers to the presence of fibrous tissue, a thickened area similar to scar tissue, which may be tender. Fibrocystic changes do not increase the chance



HEALTHY WOMAN

A SCENIC MOUNTAIN MEDICAL CENTER RESOURCE

Vivian Gordon will be the featured speaker at the October Healthy Woman event, Saturday, Oct. 3 at 1 p.m. in the ballroom of the Dora Roberts Community Center.

A complimentary lunch will be served and participants can win some exclusive door prizes. Afterward, guests are invited to participate in the Breast Health Fair featuring the American Cancer Society and others.

A "Cakes for the Cure!" contest and silent auction will benefit the local HATS ministry.

While there is no charge to attend, reservations for the event are required. For more details or to RSVP, log on to www.smmccares.com or call Kim Howell at 268-4842 or Anita Cline at 268-4721.

for breast cancer, and any discomfort can be treated with over-the-counter pain relievers or diet changes, such as limiting caffeine. Fibroadenomas, are benign tumors made of both connective tissue and breast tissue. They are more common in younger women under age 40, are round and well defined, painless, and move. Another benign tumor is a lipoma, or fatty tumor, which

is not tender and can occur anywhere.

Most benign breast conditions do not raise your risk of developing breast cancer. Depending on your diagnosis, your doctor may wish to perform imaging tests such as an ultrasound or MRI, or more frequent mammograms to keep a close eye on your health.

Mammography is available close to

home at Scenic Mountain Medical Center (SMMC). According to Vivian Gordon, radiology director, the American Cancer Society recommends a screening mammogram for all women age 40 and older or considered at-risk. To learn more, schedule an appointment with one of our women's health providers at Family Medical Center's OB/Gyn Department by calling 264-7180.



New health resources portal launches on SMMC Web site

Statistics indicate that more than 80 percent of all Internet users search for health information online. To continue to be a resource for even more powerful and useful information, Scenic Mountain Medical Center (SMMC) recently launched a new Health Resources portal on its Web site at www.smmccares.com.

Offering a collection of more than 30,000 health tools, stories and topics, this improved Health Resources portal is designed to provide the information people are looking for in a multitude of engaging ways.

In addition to more traditional offerings like a Health Encyclopedia and Wellness Library, the Health Resources Portal offers podcasts, videos, animations and other interactive tools. There's even a Spanish section with a wide range of information for the Spanish-speaking population.

"We know people are looking online for health information and we want this new Health Resources portal to be a valuable resource for our community," says Kim Howell, Marketing Director for the hospital. "We will continually update this content and build more and more links from other parts of our site to provide the information that interests our community."