

Cancer Awareness

As a college student, cancer is probably one of the last things on your mind. However, it is important to know the risk factors as well as detection methods, since prevention and early detection are key factors in successful treatment of breast and testicular cancer.

Breast Cancer

Breast Cancer is the most common type of cancer in women except for skin cancer, and is the second leading cause of cancer death, following lung cancer. A woman's lifetime risk of getting breast cancer is 1 in 7, and it is estimated that throughout 2005, 211,240 new cases of invasive breast cancer will be diagnosed in the United States. The chance of breast cancer being a woman's cause of death is about 1 in 33. Therefore, it is important that all women know the risk factors for breast cancer, and also know how to detect it early.

The most obvious risk factor for breast cancer is being a woman. Although men also get the disease, the risk for women is about 100 times greater. Other risk factors include increasing age, although younger women are also affected, and a family history of breast cancer. White women are slightly more likely to develop breast cancer than African American women. Increased exposure to estrogen is known to increase the risk, explaining why early menarche and late menopause increases risk. Studies have also shown that using hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and oral contraceptives may increase risk, as well as not having children or having your first child after age 30. Preventable risk factors include alcohol consumption, obesity, and physical inactivity.

It is a good idea to begin performing monthly breast self exams (BSE) in your 20s, and to report any change to a healthcare professional immediately. According to the American Cancer Society, women in their 20s and 30s should have a clinical breast exam (CBE) as part of a regular health exam by a

healthcare professional at least every 3 years. It is also recommended that women age 40 and older have annual screening mammograms.

How to Perform a Breast Self Exam (BSE)

- ❖ Perform your BSE every month around the same time. A good time to check your breasts is about one week after your period.
- ❖ Begin by looking for changes while standing in the following positions: hands at your side, hands raised above your head, and hands pressing down on your hips while bending forward. Look for changes in shape and color, as well as puckering, dimpling, nipple discharge, and nipple direction.
- ❖ Lie down on a firm surface. To check your right breast, lie on your left side and roll your right shoulder back toward the surface. Use the pads of your 3 middle fingers on your left hand to examine your right breast. Move your fingers in dime sized circles using three levels of pressure – light, medium, and deep – in each spot. Begin under your arm in the middle of the arm pit and work your way down to the lower bra line, and then move your way back up. Continue until you cover the entire breast area. Remember not to lift your fingers from the breast area at all during the exam. Check your left breast the same way, using your right hand.

Testicular Cancer

Testicular cancer is the most common type of cancer in men between the ages of 15 and 35. The American Cancer Society predicts that about 8,010 men in the United States will be diagnosed with testicular cancer in 2005, and about 390 men will die from the disease this year. Testicular cancer is one of the more curable cancers, with a 5-year survival rate of over 90% in all stages combined. When the cancer is caught early and is still in stage 1, the 5-year survival rate is 99%. Because testicular cancer can be so curable, it is important to emphasize early detection.

Many doctors suggest that men begin to perform monthly testicular self exams after puberty, because oftentimes a lump on the testicle is the first sign of cancer. This is especially true for men with risk factors for testicular cancer to

consider. The main risk factor for testicular cancer is a condition known as cryptorchidism, or undescended testicles. In a fetus, the testicles normally develop in the abdomen and descend into the scrotum before birth. However, in about 3% of boys, the testicles do not descend. About 14% of testicular cancer cases occur in men with a history of this condition. Another risk factor for testicular cancer is age, as most cases occur between the ages of 15 and 40, although it can occur at any age. Testicular cancer is 5 to 10 times more common in white men than African American men, and the risk for white men is more than twice that of Asian men. A family history of testicular cancer also increases a man's risk. Evidence has shown that HIV infection also increases a man's risk of developing testicular cancer, although no other infections have been shown to do the same.

How to Perform a Testicular Self Exam (TSE)

- ❖ Men should begin performing self exams at age 15 and continue until age 40. It is a good idea to do a self exam every month. The best time to perform an exam is after a hot shower, because this causes the skin of the scrotum to relax.
- ❖ Visually examine your scrotum for any swelling.
- ❖ Examine each testicle between your thumb and first two fingers of both hands. It is normal for one testicle to be slightly larger than the other. Check for lumps, swelling, or change in size or consistency of the testicles. You will feel the epididymus, a cord-like structure, on the top and back of each testicle. Do not interpret this as being abnormal.
- ❖ Contact your physician immediately if you find any lumps or abnormalities. Also, let your physician know if you have a feeling of heaviness in the scrotum, or aching in the lower abdomen or groin. These may be warning signs of cancer.