



Pink Ribbons in October Breast Cancer Awareness

The best way to stay ahead of all types of cancer is to be aware of your body. Pay attention to changes.

by **Susanne Swearengen**

There is much talk about breast cancer during the month of October. We are reminded of the signs and symptoms, and taught how to detect a problem. The necessity of breast examinations, such as mammograms and self-exams, are reiterated to the public in a variety of ways. Yet despite all of this awareness and proactivity, there is one type of breast cancer that is often overlooked—the aggressive one.

Inflammatory Breast Cancer (IBC) is a fast developing form of breast cancer that accounts for 1-5% of breast cancer cases and 25% of breast cancer-related deaths. It is a rare type of cancer, but the frequency of its occurrence has increased by 25% over the last decade. IBC often goes undetected due to its unique presentation and because it does not typically develop as a lump in the breast or surrounding tissue. IBC is also not detected by mammograms or ultrasound, as this form of cancer infiltrates the lymphatic system and goes unnoticed until physical signs develop. It is vital to act quickly once the presence of IBC has been confirmed.

If an individual even suspects something is amiss, he or she must consult a physician immediately. The five-year survival rate is much better for those who are able to get treatment quickly. This is not the time to be embarrassed to

discuss concerns or to ask questions – your life depends on it. Diagnostics, such as an MRI and tissue biopsy, will confirm whether or not cancer is present.

The best way to stay ahead of all types of cancer is to be aware of your body. Pay attention to changes. Start early in life; IBC is more common in women under the age of 40, and is even seen in teenagers. Consider yearly Thermography scans, a non-invasive imaging method that shows areas of increased heat in the body. These have been successful in detecting tiny developing cancer cells. When doing self-exams, look for the following signs:

- Rapid increase in breast size
- Changes in the skin, such as redness, thickening, dimpling or discoloration
- Inverted or swollen nipple
- Swollen or tender lymph nodes under the arm or around the collarbone
- Skin that is hot to the touch
- Persistent itching or pain in the breast region

While experts disagree on ways to prevent cancer, an unhealthy lifestyle is very likely a contributing factor. Providing the body with the nutrients and environment in which to perform at its best reduces risk and greatly improves chances of overcoming any disease. For more information, go to ibcresearch.org, komen.org, mayoclinic.com, and gerson.org. These sites offer valuable information, including where to go for help and support.

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