

October is covered in pink as National Breast Cancer Awareness Month! Also during this month, October 18 will observe National Mammography Day! This is the month for those women needing mammograms or other breast health services to take control of their own health. Regular screenings can often find breast cancer in early stages when treatment is more likely to be successful.

Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in women, exceeded only by lung cancer. The American Cancer Society estimates that about 232,340 new cases of invasive breast cancer will be diagnosed in U.S. women in 2013. In addition, it is estimated that about 39,620 women will die from breast cancer this year. The good news is that breast cancer death rates have been on the decline since about 1989. These decreases are believed to be the result of earlier detection through screenings and increased awareness.

There are many factors that may contribute to one's risk for breast cancer. Some risk factors are unable to be changed such as gender, age, genetics, family or personal history of the disease, race and ethnicity, as well as certain breast conditions. However, there are also some things you can change to help lower your risk. Being overweight or obese after menopause, being physically inactive, consuming alcohol, smoking, and using hormone replacement therapy have been shown to increase risk. By making small changes toward a healthier lifestyle, a woman can help decrease her risk of developing breast cancer.

Unfortunately, if you are uninsured or underinsured, mammograms can be expensive. Most women don't have extra money available to pay for this screening out of pocket. This is where breast health foundations can help! Foundations such as the Susan G. Komen Foundation grant money to local agencies to provide women in need with breast health services. Check with your doctor, local health department, hospital, or women's health agency to see if there are any services available to you in your area. The Hocking County Health Department is currently providing financial assistance for breast health services to women residing in Hocking County. If you are an uninsured woman or if your insurance will not pay for a service you need, please feel free to call the Hocking County Health Department at 740-385-3030 ext. 255 to see if you qualify for assistance. Income is NOT considered!

It is recommended that all women age 40 or older (unless otherwise stated by your doctor) have a mammogram performed annually. Set October 18 as the date you take control of your own wellness! Call your doctor for an appointment to talk about a mammogram, schedule your mammogram or start a healthier lifestyle on this date! Don't forget to show your support for Breast Cancer Awareness by wearing pink this month, particularly on October 18!