Persea

Quality Health, Naturally

BREAST CANCER

AWARENESS MONTH

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About Breast Cancer Awareness Month

For breast cancer survivors and their loved ones, October's Breast Cancer Awareness Month often brings a myriad of emotions. It serves as a time to highlight the challenges associated with the disease, while also acting as a poignant reminder of the journey still ahead—especially in advancing research on areas like metastatic breast cancer.

The way each survivor, often referred to by some as "cancer warriors," perceives Breast Cancer Awareness Month is intensely personal and entirely valid. For one young survivor in particular, they view this month as an opportunity to advocate for enhanced knowledge about risk factors and screenings, as well as ways to support those freshly diagnosed with breast cancer.

Here's what they want others to understand about breast cancer awareness:

The process begins with regular breast exams

While the monthly breast self-exam has become less popular recently due to some medical organizations questioning its efficacy in early cancer detection, some Cancer Societies maintain that it doesn't mean these exams are redundant. For women with an average risk of breast cancer, there are those who firmly believe in the significance of self-exams, advocating for them much like they'd emphasize monitoring aspects like menstrual cycles.

It's crucial for individuals to understand the unique characteristics of their breasts, enabling them to identify any sudden irregularities, such as changes in skin texture or the appearance of dimpling, puckering, or bulging. They should also be vigilant about other indications like alterations in nipple positioning, or signs of redness, soreness, or swelling. Since one is constantly with their own body, they are most suited to notice any deviations that might suggest an underlying issue worth further examination.

Numerous resources can guide one on conducting a breast self-exam correctly. Professionals such as gynecologists, primary care doctors, or medical providers can demonstrate the appropriate technique. It's advised to carry out these exams consistently at the same time each month, ideally a few days post menstruation. For those without regular menstrual cycles, selecting a consistent, easy-to-recall time monthly is recommended.

Individuals should be aware of their risk factors and their implications

Many assume that the absence of a family history of breast cancer means they have a reduced risk. However, this misconception can be misleading.

Merely 5-10 percent of breast cancer cases stem from inherited genes, often referred to as "hereditary" instances. Within this category, attention is frequently directed towards two genes: BRCA1 and BRCA2. Contemporary research indicates that about 72 percent of women with the BRCA1 mutation and 69 percent with the BRCA2 mutation are likely to be diagnosed with breast cancer by the age of 80. Both BRCA1 and BRCA2 mutations also elevate the risk for several other cancers, including ovarian, fallopian tube, and peritoneal cancer.

It's crucial to understand that having a familial history of breast cancer doesn't directly correlate to possessing the BRCA1 or BRCA2 mutations. In fact, many don't carry these mutations. While BRCA1 and BRCA2 are the most frequently observed, they aren't the sole genetic mutations linked to hereditary breast cancers.

For those considering understanding their genetic predisposition, tests for BRCA1 and BRCA2 mutations are available, usually conducted using DNA derived from blood or saliva samples. Interpreting these test outcomes can be intricate. Hence, a conversation with a healthcare professional is vital before deciding on testing. Moreover, seeking the guidance of a genetic counselor with expertise in cancer genetics can provide invaluable support in comprehending the test results.

Male Breast Cancer Awareness

Though uncommon, breast cancer can also affect men. Breast cancer in males constitutes less than 1 percent of all breast cancer diagnoses. While men of all ages can be diagnosed, most cases emerge after the age of 50. Risk contributors for men encompass conditions that lead to excessive estrogen, radiation exposure to the chest region, and familial histories of breast cancer. The BRCA mutation is also implicated in some male breast cancer cases, with a seemingly elevated risk in men carrying the BRCA2 mutation.

For those without a familial breast cancer background, age emerges as a significant risk factor: 85 percent of breast cancer instances occur in women aged 50 and above. Diagnoses before the age of 40, such as the individual referenced, represent only 5 percent of total cases. Other contributing factors include a history of specific benign breast conditions, dense breast tissue, and lifestyle habits like alcohol consumption.

Recognizing one's risk factors is instrumental in guiding appropriate screening decisions tailored to one's specific risk profile.

Screening is essential

Perhaps an individual hasn't begun their annual mammograms, or there's uncertainty regarding varying mammogram guidelines set by prominent health bodies. A doctor can guide them on when to initiate consistent yearly screenings and suggest the appropriate tests or imaging based on their risk level. The ideal protocol for someone with an average cancer risk might not suffice for another with a breast cancer family history.

The chosen screening method can vary depending on the person's risk, breast tissue density, or specific outcomes from a mammogram. Doctors might employ MRI or ultrasound. Recently, thermography, which utilizes an infrared camera to identify heat and blood flow patterns near the skin's surface, has been advocated by some as a mammography substitute. However, the FDA hasn't endorsed thermography as a primary breast cancer detection instrument, emphasizing that it shouldn't replace mammograms.

While mammograms have limitations and may not always accurately identify every present cancer, they are still considered the benchmark for breast cancer screening. The scheduling of mammograms could also be pivotal. Recent studies suggest that undergoing a mammogram at the cycle's onset might enhance result accuracy due to potentially reduced breast density during that phase.

How can one support a loved one diagnosed with breast cancer?

Supporting someone close after they've been diagnosed with cancer can be challenging. The individual in question has experienced both roles: attempting to support a loved one with cancer and being a cancer patient seeking support. Based on their experiences, the most impactful thing one can do is to be present and ready to listen.

This also entails truly understanding the needs of the person diagnosed with cancer when they specify a certain type of assistance. Everyone manages their cancer journey uniquely, and what one presumes might be helpful may not align with the immediate needs of their loved one. It's crucial to be physically and emotionally accessible, to actively listen, and to provide a safe environment for the patient to voice their concerns as well as celebrate their milestones related to their cancer journey.

Throughout their treatment, this individual drew immense strength from the unwavering support of their spouse and family. Whether it was stocking up on nourishing comfort foods or accompanying them on walks to regain their stamina, the mere presence of loved ones played a monumental role in their healing process.

Upon receiving a breast cancer diagnosis, what are the next steps?

Receiving such a diagnosis can be an intense and overwhelming experience. One insight from an individual diagnosed with breast cancer in 2016 highlights the significance of self-compassion and patience. Recognizing a cancer diagnosis as a journey, with each step marking progression, can help in navigating the process.

This person emphasizes the power of community during such trying times. The isolation and emotions post-diagnosis can be daunting, but there's a vast community of individuals undergoing similar experiences eager to connect and share. Modern platforms, especially social media, have facilitated such connections. For this individual, one of the support groups found at https://canceralliance.co.za/cancer-in-sa/useful-cancer-resources/support-groups/ was a beacon, but others might find solace in different communities better tailored to their unique situations.

Equally vital is assembling the right medical team. Despite the urgency associated with a cancer diagnosis, patients deserve a team that understands and addresses their concerns comprehensively. Seeking a second opinion is completely acceptable, and current medical professionals might even assist in connecting with other specialists. It's important to remember that breast health, like any other health aspect, is multifaceted. An all-encompassing medical team can guide one through various phases of treatment and post-treatment health maintenance.

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Post the primary cancer treatment, this person found solace in integrative and functional medicine. However, while integrative medicine can be beneficial for many, it's paramount to discuss any additional treatments with an oncology team to ensure their suitability and safety.

A common misconception is viewing cancer treatment as a discrete timeframe, anticipating a return to "normalcy" post-treatment. However, this "normal" may manifest differently than expected. Despite the challenges, it's reassuring to know a plethora of resources and support systems exists to assist patients during and after their treatment journey.



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Prevention and knowledge are our best allies. Healthy living is not just a choice; it's a lifestyle that can dramatically influence our future well-being. Proper diet, exercise, and mental well-being play pivotal roles in our overall health and resilience against diseases.

Persea Health stands at the forefront of health education, ensuring that individuals are equipped with the right knowledge to make informed decisions about their well-being and prepare individuals to have a conversation with health professionals like doctors about their conditions and treatments. Additionally, Persea provides an array of supplements tailored to complement a balanced diet, supporting an optimal lifestyle. These supplements are carefully curated, emphasizing natural ingredients and their benefits.

Moreover, the power of community cannot be understated in the health journey. Being a part of the Persea discussion groups offers a platform to connect, share, and learn with like-minded individuals. It fosters a space for mutual support and the exchange of invaluable insights. If you're eager to get into the world of health and wellness, simply scan the provided QR Codes to become a part of this thriving community.

In conclusion, remember that your health journey is a marathon, not a sprint. With resources like Persea Health by your side, you're well-equipped to embark on a path towards a healthier, brighter future. Choose wisely, live healthily, and always prioritize your well-being.

Good health to you and your family

Persea Heakth Team

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