

Breast cancer disparities

Written by

Monday, 14 October 2013 12:49



Black women have the highest breast cancer death rates of all racial and ethnic groups and are 40% more likely to die of breast cancer than white women.

[Breast cancer](#) is the second leading cause of cancer deaths among women in the United States. Breast cancer deaths are going down fastest among white women. Black women are more likely to die of breast cancer than other women.



Many factors contribute to this difference—

- Black women often have cancers that grow faster and are harder to treat.
- Black women often have [fewer social and economic resources](#) than other women.
- Black women are less likely to get prompt follow-up care when their mammogram shows something that is not normal.

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- Black women are less likely to get high-quality treatment if they have cancer.

Differences in Screening, Follow-Up, and Treatment

Screening. *Screening* means looking for cancer before symptoms appear. [Mammograms](#) are the best way to find breast cancer. A

mammogram

is an X-ray picture of the breast. Black and white women get mammograms at about the same rate. But more black women have breast cancer that has spread beyond the breast compared with white women when the cancer is found.

Follow-up. When a mammogram shows something is not normal, follow-up tests are needed to see if it is cancer. Compared with white women, more black women take longer to complete these tests after finding out they have a mammogram that is not normal. Waiting longer for follow-up care may lead to cancers that are larger and harder to treat.

Treatment. After cancer is found, treatment should start as soon as possible. Fewer black women start treatment in a timely way compared with white women. Also, fewer black women get the surgery, radiation, and hormone treatments they need compared with white women.

Ways to Lower Your Risk for Breast Cancer



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Get mammograms regularly. If you are 50 to 74 years old, be sure to have a screening mammogram every two years. If you are 40–49 years old, talk to your doctor about when and how often you should have a screening mammogram.

Are you worried about the cost? [Find out if you qualify](#) for a free or low-cost mammogram through CDC's National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program.

Know your family history of breast cancer. If you have a parent, sibling, or child with breast cancer, ask your doctor how you can lower your risk.

Learn about hormone replacement therapy. Some women use hormone replacement therapy to treat the symptoms of menopause. Ask your doctor about the risks and benefits and find out if hormone replacement therapy is right for you.

How Health Care Providers Can Help Their Patients Get Breast Cancer Screening and Care

Remind patients of their appointments. Have the office staff remind your patients of their upcoming appointments. Track the progress of patients who need follow-up tests or treatment to make sure they get the care they need. If possible, assign a patient navigator.



Talk with each patient about her risk of breast cancer, the benefits and risks of mammograms, and the right age to start getting mammograms. Tell her where she can get a mammogram done. Don't forget some women may not be able to afford a mammogram. If the mammogram shows something that is not normal, explain the next set of tests. Answer all of her questions.

Get test results quickly and call your patients right away. If needed, refer them to the next test or doctor right away.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention