



ADVANCES *in mammography*

OUR EXPERT: DR. DANIELLE WELLMAN, RADIOLOGIST SPECIALIZING IN MAMMOGRAPHY, WAKE RADIOLOGY

The American Cancer Society reveals that one in eight women will develop invasive breast cancer in their lifetime. This year alone, another 232,670 new cases are expected. In addition, another 62,570 cases of non-invasive breast cancer (the earliest form) are expected.

About 40,000 women are expected to die this year of breast cancer. “How can women best protect themselves from breast cancer? By getting an annual screening mammogram,” says Dr. Danielle Wellman, a radiologist who specializes in breast imaging at Wake Radiology and is co-director of breast services. “Powerful new technologies like 3D mammography are making it easier than ever before to detect breast cancer early, when it is most treatable.”

Many of the symptoms of breast cancer don’t show up until the disease has progressed. These symptoms may include a lump in the breast or the underarm, breast pain or tenderness, swelling or dimpling of the breast, nipple discharge or retraction of the nipple. When breast cancer is in its earliest stages, no symptoms may be felt, which is why regular self-exams and mammograms are recommended.

The American Cancer Society recommends that all women start receiving mammograms at age 40 and continue to get one every year. Mammograms can help detect breast cancer before symptoms emerge.

“The best advice is to be vigilant about checking for breast cancer because it is very treatable when detected early,” Dr. Wellman says. She adds that those who have a family history of breast

cancer may want to begin getting mammograms earlier than 40 – perhaps as much as seven to 10 years earlier.

In addition to the traditional mammogram, 3D mammograms are now available to provide more powerful screening.

“The introduction of 3D mammography represents one of the biggest advancements in breast cancer screening in the past 20 years,” Dr. Wellman says. “It provides more accurate images that help us detect breast cancer earlier.”

With a 3D mammogram, 15 images are taken of the breast from many different angles, rather than the single image taken by a traditional mammogram.

“This allows us to view the breast tissue in thin slices – like flipping through the pages of a book,” Dr. Wellman explains.

Dr. Wellman says that this technology allows healthcare professionals to see smaller and more invasive cancers more clearly, as well as to pinpoint the location, size and shape of abnormal tissue more easily.

“That’s why the use of 3D mammograms has been shown to improve breast cancer detection rates by up to 40 percent,” Dr. Wellman says.

Getting a 3D mammogram is no different than getting a traditional mammogram. The process is the same. The exam only makes moments and the entire appointment lasts about 30 minutes from the time you walk in the door.

Not only can 3D mammograms help to detect breast cancer earlier, but in so doing, they can also save patients from having to undergo intensive and debilitating treatments. It can also reduce the rate of error and the need for follow-up exams, which can increase anxiety in patients.

“Breast cancer is treatable and curable, but the key is early detection,” Dr. Wellman says. “When detected

early, the survival rate for women with breast cancer is over 90 percent.”

Studies show routine breast cancer screen reduces mortality rates by 30 percent – saving the lives of 15,000 to 20,000 women in the United States each year who would have otherwise died from breast cancer.

Making lifestyle choices can also help.

“Living a healthy lifestyle can help reduce your risk of breast cancer,” Dr. Wellman says. “That includes maintaining a healthy weight, exercising regularly, limiting alcohol consumption, and not smoking.” 🍏

