

Understanding Cancer Screenings



Cancer screening is a way to check for cancer before you have any symptoms. Screening has the goal of finding cancer early, before it has a chance to grow or spread and is most treatable.

Why is Screening Important?

When found early, cancer is often easier to treat. Regular screenings for breast, colon, and cervical cancer are usually recommended by doctors based on your age and risk factors.

Screening for cancer is a personal decision. Your healthcare team can recommend which screening options are right for you based on your age, family history, and health. Cancer screenings may be available at your primary care office, diagnostic center, at a hospital, or even in the comfort of your own home. There are different ways to screen for cancer.

Speak with your care team to learn which screenings are right for you.

Screening Options Include:

Medical procedures - like a colonoscopy

Imaging scans - like a mammogram or CT scan

Blood tests - to look for cancer markers

Self-exams - like checking your skin or breasts for changes

At-home tests - like stool samples that you send to a lab or self-collection cervical swabs in a controlled, medical setting, usually a doctor's office or lab

The United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) is a group of healthcare professionals and health experts. They work together to evaluate and establish healthy lifestyle guidelines. The USPSTF is trusted as the gold standard for screening recommendations. Your doctor may refer to screening guidelines from other national or professional organizations as well.

This resource talks about the screening guidelines for different types of cancer. It describes screening procedures, self-examinations, and other prevention methods. It also talks about how to overcome barriers to screening. This fact sheet will provide you with the steps to schedule your next screening.

For more information and resources on screening, prevention, and early detection, visit www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/Screening-Prevention



BREAST CANCER SCREENINGS

Most people who get breast cancer are women. That is why screening is often recommended for women starting at age 40. If you are between 40 and 74 years old, it is recommended to get a breast cancer screening every two years. This recommendation is for women at an average risk of developing breast cancer.

The following may require increased frequency or different types of screening:

- *Having a family history of breast cancer*
- *Certain inherited variations*
- *Dense breast tissue*

People of all genders have breast tissue and therefore can get breast cancer, including men, transgender, and non-binary individuals. Breast cancer is most common in people assigned female at birth. If you have breast tissue, you may be at risk. Talk to your doctor to discuss if and when screening for breast cancer is right for you.



Mammography is the most effective method to screen for breast cancer. This test uses an X-ray to take pictures of the inside of the breast. These scans can be used to create a 2 or 3 dimensional (2D or 3D) image of the breast. These pictures are called mammograms. These pictures can show early signs of breast cancer, even before feeling a lump or symptoms appear. Women at a higher risk of developing breast cancer may require screening with a breast magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) or ultrasound in addition to their mammogram.



GENETIC TESTING FOR INHERITED CANCER RISK

Your doctor may recommend genetic testing if you have a family history of cancer. Genetic testing looks for variants, or changes, in your genes that may increase your risk of getting certain cancers. Commonly inherited cancer syndromes include:

BRCA Gene Variations

Variations in BRCA 1 and BRCA 2 genes are the most common and well-known genetic risk factors for hereditary breast and ovarian cancer. If you test positive in a BRCA genetic test (are BRCA+), that means there is a variant in one of your BRCA genes — either BRCA1 or BRCA 2. This positive result increases your cancer risk.

Depending on the specific variant and gene, BRCA gene variants can increase your risk of developing:

- **Breast cancer**
- **Ovarian cancer**
- **Prostate cancer**
- **Pancreatic cancer**

People of all genders can carry BRCA variants. If you have a family history of these cancers, talk with your doctor or a genetic counselor about whether genetic testing is right for you. If you have a BRCA gene variation, it is important to talk with your healthcare team about screening and make a plan for how often you should get checked for cancer.



Lynch Syndrome

Lynch syndrome is an inherited genetic condition that increases your risk of developing colorectal and endometrial cancer. It can be caused by variants occurring in several different genes. People with Lynch syndrome may also be more likely to develop prostate and other cancers.

Inherited variations may increase a person's risk of developing cancer in general, but also possibly at an earlier age. Knowing you have a genetic variation that increases your risk can help you take steps to reduce your chances of developing cancer. Your voice and wishes should be included throughout the decision-making process regarding genetic testing for cancer risk. Talk with your care team about how often you should get screened for cancer. Share any worries or questions.

If you have genetic testing done, share the results with your family. Share your results even if they come back negative for certain variations. This information can help others take the necessary steps for their health.

COLORECTAL CANCER (CRC) SCREENINGS

It is now recommended that adults between 45–75 years old are screened for colorectal cancer. Colorectal cancer rates are increasing in young adults under age 50. Because of this, screening guidelines now recommend starting at age 45, even if you feel healthy and have no symptoms.

There are several screening tests to detect early stages of colorectal cancer. Each method has its own benefits and risks. It is important to consider your personal preferences when deciding which method is right for you. Discuss your screening options and questions with your doctor to decide on the best approach.

Visit www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/Screening-Prevention to learn more about the risks and benefits of each colorectal cancer screening method.



STOOL-BASED TESTS

Stool-based tests will check your stool (poop) for signs of hidden blood or abnormal DNA. Precancerous growths can cause small amounts of blood in your stool. Finding blood or genetic changes in your stool may be a sign of colorectal cancer. These tests can be done in the privacy of your own home, using a kit that helps you collect a stool sample.

Guaiac Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT)
Every 1 year

Fecal Immunochemical Test (FIT)
Every 1 year

Stool DNA Test
Every 1–3 years

DIRECT VISUALIZATION TESTS

Direct visualization tests are procedures where a doctor can look inside your colon and rectum to check for signs of colorectal cancer. During a colonoscopy or flexible sigmoidoscopy, your care team may remove and sample any abnormal growths found during the exam. Your doctor will schedule additional follow-up testing for any abnormal results found during your initial exam.

Colonoscopy
Every 10 years

CT Colonography
Every 5 years

Flexible Sigmoidoscopy
Every 5 years
Every 10 years, when performing an annual FIT

**These recommendations are for people with an average risk of developing colorectal cancer. Your frequency of testing is dependent on your personal health history, family health history, the type of screening test you take, and whether your last screening exam had normal or abnormal results.*





PROSTATE CANCER SCREENINGS

People with prostates between the ages of 55–69 should talk to their doctor about their prostate cancer screening options. All men (people assigned male at birth) have prostate tissue and are therefore at risk for prostate cancer. There is ongoing research about how effective prostate cancer screening is at saving lives. For people with a family history and increased risk, screening for prostate cancer is appropriate and needed.

The Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) test is the most widely accepted screening method. A PSA test is a simple blood test. Your doctor takes a small sample of your blood to measure the level of PSA, a protein made by the prostate. Elevated PSA levels may be an early sign of prostate cancer. This can also be related to a variety of conditions that are not cancer. Speak with your doctor about what your elevated PSA levels mean for you.

The decision to be screened is personal and dependent on your risk of developing prostate cancer. It is important to know the warning signs. Contact your doctor if you notice any new or unusual urinary symptoms. **Take action — talk with your care team about whether prostate cancer screening is right for you.**

LUNG CANCER SCREENINGS

Yearly lung cancer screenings are recommended for adults aged 50–80 with a 20 pack-year smoking history. A pack-year measures how much a person has smoked throughout their life. A pack-year is the number of packs per day smoked multiplied by the number of years you smoked. Even if you currently smoke or have quit smoking within the past 15 years, you are eligible to screen for lung cancer. This type of screening reduces premature deaths in screened individuals.

Low-dose CT (LDCT) scans of the chest are the widely accepted screening test for lung cancer. LDCT scans capture detailed images of your lungs. This quick, noninvasive scan looks for early signs of lung cancer.

Talk to your doctor if you feel that you have an increased risk of lung cancer and are not eligible for screening under current guidelines.



Coping With Stigma

Keep in mind that anyone can get lung cancer. Lung cancer happens when the cells in the lung start to grow uncontrollably. Various factors can increase lung cancer risk including age and genetic factors. Just like with any other cancer type, smoking is only one of the risk factors. If you have a history of smoking and are experiencing feelings of stigma, guilt, or shame — you are not alone. Reach out to your doctor to discuss your yearly lung cancer screenings.

CSC's **Coping with the Stigma of Lung Cancer** resource provides tips on how to overcome stigma and feelings of judgement, guilt, or shame.



CERVICAL CANCER SCREENINGS

Everyone with a cervix should begin screening for cervical cancer at 21 years old. All women (people assigned female at birth) have cervix tissue and are therefore at a risk for cervical cancer. The type of screening for cervical cancer and how often you need it depends on your age and the rapidly changing guidelines. Communicate with your doctor to learn more about any updates to the screening guidelines.

Currently, individuals between 21–29 years old should be screened for cervical cancer using a pap test. A pap test, also known as a pap smear, is a screening procedure that looks for cancerous cells in your cervix. Your gynecologist will collect a sample of cells from your cervix and look at them under the microscope. These cells can also be tested for human papillomavirus (HPV). Women between 21–29 years old should be screened for cervical cancer every 3 years.

HUMAN PAPILLOMA VIRUS & CERVICAL CANCER

Cervical cancer is not generally thought to be inherited. This cancer is highly associated with infection from certain types of a virus called the human papilloma virus (HPV). This type of virus is very common. It is passed on during sexual activity. Most often, HPV does not cause any symptoms. Only certain high-risk types of HPV increase cervical cancer risk.

Getting the recommended HPV vaccine can greatly reduce the risk of cervical cancer.



If you are between the ages of 30–65 years, the different screening options for cervical cancer include:

- **Pap Test:** Screen every 3 years using only the Pap test.
- **HPV Testing:** Screen every 5 years using only HPV testing.
- **Co-testing:** Screen every 5 years with the pap test and HPV testing at the same time.

If you are unsure which screening option is right for you, reach out to your healthcare team. Ask your doctor to explain the risks and benefits of each option to choose a method that works best for you.

PREVENTION & EARLY DETECTION

The best way to protect yourself is to prevent cancer from starting. There are some simple steps you can take to reduce your risk of developing cancer.

Stop smoking – Smoking is a leading cause of lung cancer and increases risk for a variety of other cancers. Talk to your healthcare team to take steps to quit.

Limit alcohol consumption – High levels of alcohol consumption are associated with increased risk for several cancers. Generally, guidelines suggest men should consume no more than two alcoholic beverages daily, and women no more than one.

Maintain a healthy body – A healthy lifestyle including regular exercise and a diet low in fats and rich in whole grains, fruits, and vegetables has been associated with a reduced risk of a variety of cancers.

Make an informed decision about the HPV vaccination – HPV is a viral infection that is a known risk factor for some cancers. Childhood HPV vaccination can prevent the majority of HPV-related cancers. This vaccine is now available to people up to age 45.

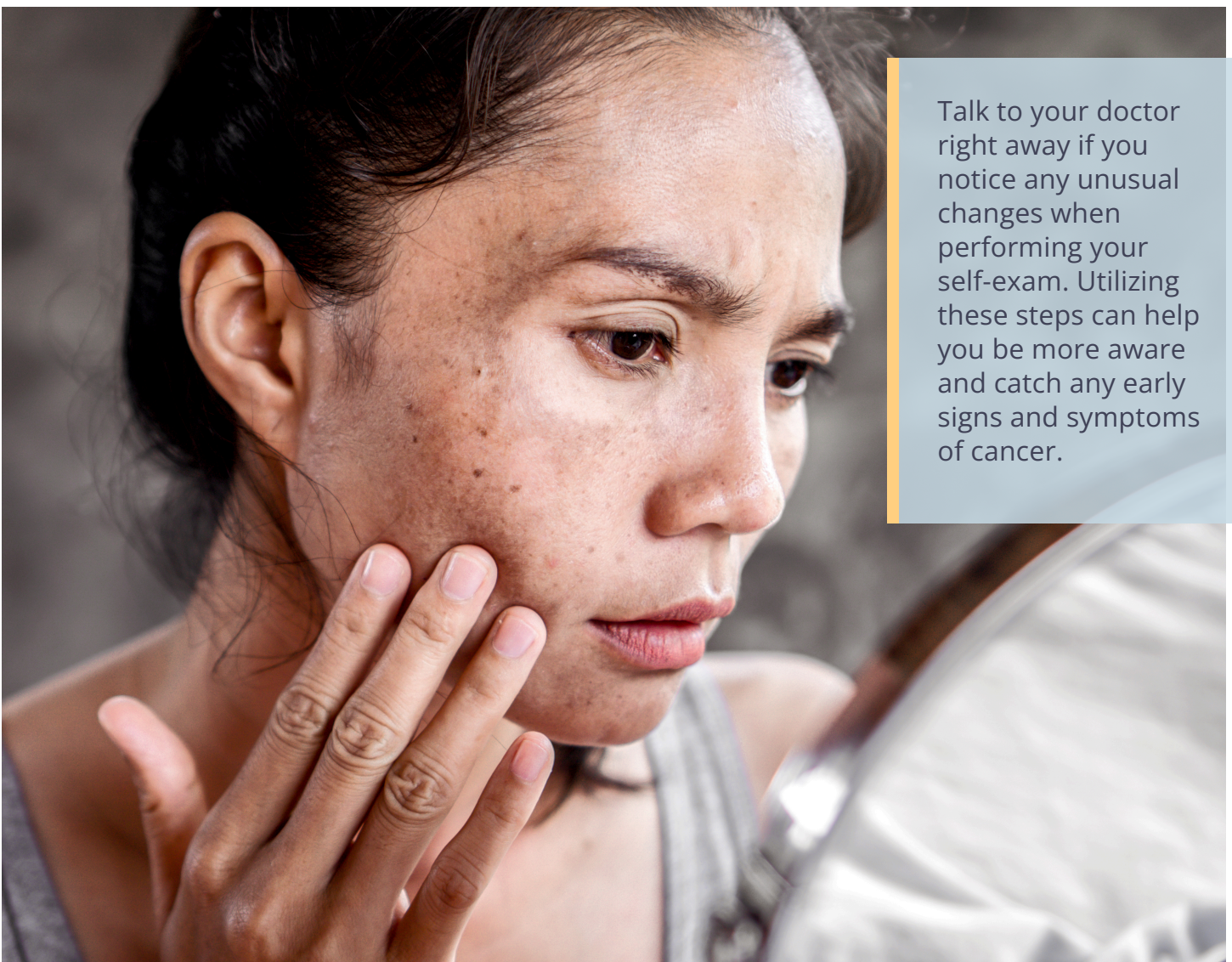
Not all cancers can be prevented. When caught early, many cancers are easier to treat. There are many steps you can take to check for early signs of cancer. Here are some steps you can take to prevent and detect cancer early.



Perform monthly skin self-exams. Check all the surfaces of your skin and look closely at your moles so that you can tell if they begin to change shape, size, or color.

Perform monthly testicular self-exams. Check the testicles for new lumps or swelling. If you are familiar with your testicles, it is easier to notice any unusual changes at an early stage.

Perform monthly breast self-exams. Check the breasts for any unusual changes. This exam should be performed while standing in the mirror or lying down. Breast self-exams help you become familiar with the way your breasts typically look and feel. This makes it easier to identify any lumps or skin changes.



Talk to your doctor right away if you notice any unusual changes when performing your self-exam. Utilizing these steps can help you be more aware and catch any early signs and symptoms of cancer.

ADDRESSING SCREENING BARRIERS

The benefits of early detection through routine screening are well known. Yet, many people are still behind on their routine screenings. This may be due to challenges or concerns around screening. There also may be misunderstandings or misconceptions about screening. Below is a list of common screening concerns and tips to overcome them.

Financial

The cost of medical services or not having health insurance can make it harder to get routine screenings. Talking with a financial navigator or social worker can help address any financial barriers to screening.

Our financial navigator assists people with financial issues related to cancer, including providing referrals to resources that may help with cancer-related treatment expenses. Services also include tips on how to manage treatment-related costs, how to communicate with healthcare providers about the cost of care and payment, and understanding insurance benefits.

**Contact our Helpline -
888-793-9355**

Educational

There are many ways to detect cancer early. It can be overwhelming trying to remember all the screening recommendations. The first step is to learn which routine screening tests are recommended for your age range. Talk to your doctor about which screening is right for you. Schedule your routine exams, and stay on top of how often you should be getting screened.

Emotional

Fear may be what is stopping people from scheduling their routine screening exams. Screening for cancer can be a scary process for some people. It is normal to feel anxious before a screening procedure and while waiting for the results. However, this should not stop people from scheduling their annual screenings. If you are feeling anxious about any part of the cancer screening process, reach out to your care team to discuss your concerns.

Cultural

Despite higher cancer rates, people from some racial and ethnic groups and historically underserved communities tend to screen less often. Select groups may feel anxious or hesitant to screen for cancer because of:

- **Language barriers**
- **Medical mistrust**
- **Personal and cultural beliefs & values**
- **Geographic location**

Screening and early detection is important. Most guidelines are established for people with an average risk of developing cancer. Some racial, ethnic, and cultural groups are associated with an increase in the risk of developing cancer and require an adjusted screening schedule. It is important to find a care team that listens and respects your wishes and values. Talk with your team about your personal risk, and work with them to create a screening schedule that is best for you.





CANCER SCREENING RESOURCES

Screening, Prevention, and Early Detection – Cancer Support Community
www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/Screening-Prevention

FORCE: Facing Hereditary Cancer Empowered
www.FacingOurRisk.org

Prevent Cancer Foundation
www.PreventCancer.org

American Cancer Society
800-227-2345
www.Cancer.org/Guidelines-for-Early-Detection-of-Cancer

United States Preventive Services Task Force
www.USPreventiveServicesTaskForce.org/USPSTF

Centers for Disease Control (CDC) - Cancer Screening Tests
www.CDC.gov/Cancer/Prevention/Screening

Cancer Support Community Resources

Cancer Support Helpline® — Have questions, concerns or looking for resources? Call CSC's toll-free Cancer Support Helpline (888-793-9355), available in 200 languages Mon-Thurs 11am-8pm ET and Fri 11am-6pm ET.

Open to Options® — Preparing for your next appointment? Our trained specialists can help you create a list of questions to share with your doctor. Make an appointment by calling 888-793-9355 or by contacting your local CSC or Gilda's Club.

Frankly Speaking About Cancer® — Trusted information for cancer patients and their loved ones is available through publications, online, and in-person programs.

Services at Local CSCs and Gilda's Clubs — With the help of over 200 locations, in 50 markets, CSC and Gilda's Club centers provide services free of charge to people impacted by cancer. Attend support groups, educational sessions, wellness programs, and more
www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/FindLocation.

Cancer Experience Registry® — Help others by sharing your cancer patient or cancer caregiver experience via survey at www.CancerExperienceRegistry.org

MyLifeLine® — CSC's secure, online community welcomes anyone impacted by cancer to easily connect with community to reduce stress, anxiety, and isolation. Create a personal network site and invite friends & family to follow your journey. And participate in our discussion forums any time of day to meet others like you who understand what you are experiencing. Join now at www.MyLifeLine.org.

Grassroots Network — Make sure your voice is heard by federal and state policy makers on issues affecting cancer patients and survivors by joining our Network at www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/Become-Advocate.

This publication is available to download and print at www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/Screening-Prevention

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