united for health

October 2007

Breast Cancer

Breast cancer is one of the most common types of cancer among women in the United States. Breast cancer can occur in men, too. But, it's not as common. Everyone should be aware of risk factors. And, learn how to protect your health.

Who Gets Breast Cancer?

You are at a higher risk of getting breast cancer if you:

- Are age 40 or older
- Have a mother, sister or daughter who has breast cancer
- Started your period before age 12
- Started menopause after age 55
- Had your first child after age 30, or had no children
- Have had breast cancer before

What Are the Signs?

A woman with breast cancer may not see any signs at first. That's why it's important to see your doctor regularly. Once symptoms begin to show, a woman with breast cancer may notice:

- A lump or thickening in or near the breast or in the underarm area
- Change in the size or shape of the breast
- Discharge from the nipple
- Change in the color or feel of the skin on or around any part of the breast—skin may be dimpled, puckered or scaly

Although these are signs of breast cancer, they also may be signs of less serious health conditions. Don't panic—but do talk with your doctor as soon as you see any symptoms.

Checking for Breast Cancer

When cancer is found and treated early, you'll have a better chance of recovery.

Ask about breast self-exams. The effectiveness of self-exams isn't yet proven. But, they may help you stay aware of changes in your body. Talk with your doctor if you notice any changes. Your doctor can help you learn more about self-exams.

Get regular checkups. Talk with your doctor about breast exams and mammograms, or breast x-rays. Ask at what age and how often you need a mammogram.

Live a healthy life. Limit alcohol. Eat low-fat foods, and lots of fruits and vegetables. Ask your doctor what weight is right for you. Try to stay close to that weight and exercise.

More information is available at myuhc.com®.

Your Child's Cold or Flu

When your child is sick, you want him or her to get the best care. Minor colds or flu usually can be treated at home. These tips can help.

Know What to Look For

Your child will have some or all of these signs with a cold or flu: fever, runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, red, watery eyes, headache, body aches and pains, sneezing, cough, feeling tired, not hungry.

Caring for Your Child

Give your child plenty of fluids. Water, fruit juice and soup are good choices. Try to get her to eat, but only if she's hungry. Your child needs rest to get well. Help him to sleep, read or play quietly. And, keep him indoors, where it's warm and dry. Take steps to prevent others from getting sick. Keep your child away from other children. Make sure she washes her hands often. Keep yours clean, too. Use soap and warm running water. Frequently wash toys, bedding and other items, as well. Be careful with medicine. Read all of the instructions on package labels. And, never give aspirin to anyone age 19 or younger. It can cause Reye's syndrome—a rare, but serious illness. Use acetaminophen (Tylenol) for fever instead. Use a cool mist vaporizer or humidifier. Clean it daily or as directed.

Call the doctor or clinic if your child:

- Has a fever over 102°F that doesn't get better in two days
- Has an earache
- Has dark green or yellow drainage from the nose
- Has diarrhea
- Won't drink at all
- Throws up two or more times a day
- Coughs a lot for more than 10 days
- Has swollen glands

Go to the emergency room if your child:

- Has a fever of 104°F or higher (or if 3 months old or younger—100.4°F)
- Seems confused or extremely fussy
- Is very drowsy and you can't wake her
- Hasn't urinated in eight hours
- Has trouble breathing, but not severe

Call 911 if your child has severe trouble breathing and can't speak.

How to Do a Breast Self-Exam

Why?

Breast self-exams (BSEs) are one part of a good breast health program. Becoming familiar with the shape and feel of your breasts can help you identify changes that you may need to discuss with your doctor. Keep in mind, monthly BSEs are not a substitute for an annual clinical exam.

When?

The ideal time to do a BSE is five to seven days after the last day of your menstrual period. This is the time when your breasts are least likely to be lumpy or tender. Women who no longer have periods or are pregnant should select a day—such as the 1st or 15th—and perform a BSE on that day every month.

How?

A BSE has three steps—do each of these at the same time every month:

In the shower. Raise one arm. With your fingers flat, use the pads of your fingers to touch every part of your breast, gently feeling for a lump or thickening. Use your right hand to examine your left breast—and your left hand for your right breast.

In front of a mirror. Look carefully at both breasts for changes in size, shape, color or contour. Do this with your arms at your sides, then with both arms raised above your head. Look for puckering, dimpling or changes in skin texture. Gently squeeze both nipples and look for discharge.

Lying down. Place a towel or pillow under your right shoulder and your right hand behind your head. Examine your right breast with your left hand. With your fingers flat, use the pads of your fingers to press gently over your entire breast, moving your fingers in a small circular motion. Be sure to check the outer part of your breast under your armpit. Repeat with your left breast.

It's normal to feel apprehensive when you examine your breasts—especially at first. Breast tissue may naturally feel lumpy and uneven. As you become more familiar with how your breasts feel, you will learn what is normal for you. Talk with your doctor if you are concerned, notice any changes or have any questions.

Call Care24—any time, 24 hours every day—at no cost to you. Learn more about breast cancer or how to do a breast self-exam. You also can call about many other health issues.

©2001 Optum

Care24 1-877-365-7950

TDD/TTY callers, please call the National Relay Center at 1-800-855-2880 and ask for 1-877-365-7950.

www.myuhc.com

Avoiding the Flu

This year with the reduced availability of flu vaccine it will be very important to take preventive measures to avoid getting the flu. Knowing the signs and symptoms of influenza and following some simple steps should be helpful.

Clinical Signs and Symptoms of Influenza from the CDC (www.cdc.gov)

Influenza viruses are spread from person to person primarily through coughing, sneezing or touching. The incubation period for influenza is 1-4 days, with an average of 2 days. Adults are typically infectious from the day before symptoms begin through approximately 5 days after illness onset. Children can be infectious for as long as10 days after illness onset and up to about 6 days before their illness onset.

Uncomplicated influenza illness is characterized by the abrupt onset of fever, muscle aches, headache, severe malaise, dry cough, sore throat, and runny nose. Among children, ear infection, nausea, and vomiting are also commonly reported with influenza illness.

Influenza illness is typically over after a few days for most people, although coughing and the feeling of weakness can persist for about 2 weeks. In young children influenza can sometimes produce high fevers that can trigger seizures. Among certain persons, influenza can make underlying medical conditions worse (e.g., pulmonary or cardiac disease), or lead to pneumonia. Influenza infection has also been associated with Reye syndrome (therefore, do not treat children with aspirin-use Tylenol).
What can I do?

10 Step Program

1. Get a flu shot if you are in the high risk population* (see priority list below)
2. Try to stay away from people who are sick and who cough or sneeze
3. If you are sick, stay home and cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze into a tissue not your hand. A contaminated hand spreads virus everywhere you touch
4. Wash your hands thoroughly with lots of soap frequently especially prior to eating and drinking
5. Keep surface areas clean - viruses live for several hours on desks, tables, kitchen and bathroom counters and doorknobs
6. Keep your hands away from your eyes, nose and mouth
7. Eat right with plenty of fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and supplements for the areas where your diet is inadequate
8. Get plenty of sleep - a well rested body is your best defense
9. Get plenty of activity - exercise strengthens the immune system
10. Consider carrying one of the alcohol gel hand sanitizers (like Purel) and use it frequently

The CDC defines those "high risk" populations as follows:

- Children 6 to 23 months old
- Those 65 or older
- Those 2 to 64 years old with serious chronic medical conditions
- Women who are or expect to be pregnant during the flu season
- Residents of nursing homes and other long-term-care facilities
- Children 6 months to 18 years old on chronic aspirin therapy
- Health care workers with direct patient contact
- Those who live with or care for children younger than 6 months old

If you or one of your family members is in one of these "high risk" categories, please contact your personal physician or local health department to get the influenza immunizations as soon as possible.

For more information about the CDC's flu vaccination recommendations, check their Web site at www.cdc.gov

Generic Medications

Prescription drugs can be costly. But, if you can use a generic version instead of a brand name, you may be able to save money. In fact, generic drugs save patients an average of $8 to $10 billion a year. And, they're just as safe as brand names.

What are generic medications?

A generic drug is an exact copy of a brand-name drug. It's the same in dosage, safety, strength, quality, performance, side effects and intended use. They may vary in size, color, shape and inactive ingredients. But, there's no effect on the benefits, effectiveness or safety of the medication. This is true of all generic drugs.

How are they approved?

When a pharmaceutical company develops a brand-name drug, it must go through the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval process. This ensures that the medication is safe. Then, a patent is granted that protects other businesses from producing the same prescription for 20 years. After this period, companies are free to produce the drug in a generic form. And, like brand-name medications, generics also must be approved by the FDA. This requires that a generic drug have the exact same makeup as its brand-name equivalent. Many companies manufacture both generic and brand-name drugs.

Why do they cost less?

When a company brings a brand-name drug to market, it's responsible for the cost of research, development and marketing of the medication. But, because generic drug manufacturers don't have some of these costs, they're able to sell a less expensive product. On average, a generic prescription is less than one-third the price of its brand-name counterpart. And, once a generic drug is approved, other companies also may try to produce the same medication. The more versions there are, the lower the cost. About half of all drugs on the market have generic versions.

Who should I ask for a generic drug?

Work with your doctor and pharmacist to learn if any of your current medications have generic forms that you might be able to use. And, when you get a new prescription for a brand-name medication, you may want to ask if a generic drug is available. Explain that you would like the most effective drug at the best price.

Pre-Diabetes
Are You at Risk?

Type 2 diabetes can develop at any age. Diabetes, while manageable, can put you at risk for a number of health conditions, including kidney disease, vision problems, heart disease and stroke. Researchers have found it almost always is preceded by a condition called pre-diabetes.

In pre-diabetes, blood-glucose levels are higher than normal, but not quite high enough to warrant a diabetes diagnosis. The good news is, if pre-diabetes is detected early enough, you can take steps to prevent or delay the onset of Type 2 diabetes.

Who Gets Pre-Diabetes?

There are factors that may put some people at a greater risk for pre-diabetes. These include being age 45 or older, having a family history of diabetes, undesirable cholesterol levels or high blood pressure, or being overweight or inactive. Certain ethnic groups seem to have an increased risk as well. But, anyone can develop pre-diabetes. Your doctor can help assess your risk.

How Is It Diagnosed?

There are two different tests that doctors commonly use to diagnose pre-diabetes. Both generally require that you fast—or refrain from eating—for a period of time. Then, your doctor will check your glucose levels either before you eat or after you drink a sugary substance.

What Can You Do?

Being diagnosed with pre-diabetes gives you the opportunity to take action now to delay Type 2 diabetes. Many people can get great results through lifestyle changes. If you've been diagnosed with pre-diabetes, your doctor may recommend the following:

Exercise—Staying active is a great way to turn back the clock on diabetes. Just 30 minutes a day of moderate physical activity can make a difference. Work with your doctor to develop a healthy exercise program for you.

Weight Loss—A five to 10 percent reduction in body weight may help prevent or delay the onset of Type 2 diabetes significantly. Your doctor can help you set a realistic weight loss goal—and provide tips for achieving and maintaining it.

Routine monitoring—Regular blood sugar screenings allow your doctor to monitor your diabetes risk. If the condition does develop, you'll have the advantage of early detection.

Learn more about diabetes on myuhc.com®.

UnitedHealthcare®
A UnitedHealth Group Company

Articles on health and wellness, as well as those on UnitedHealthcare programs and services, are provided by and copyrighted by UnitedHealthcare. They may not be alerted or reprinted without permission. All other information is provided by your employer.