

The Early Detection Edge

Though some cancers have no effective method for facilitating early detection, there are ways to screen for breast cancer with the goal of diagnosing the disease at an early, treatable stage. In 2003, the American Cancer Society issued the following guidelines for the early detection of breast cancer:

1. Yearly mammograms are recommended starting at age 40 and continuing for as long as a woman is in good health.
2. A clinical breast exam should be part of a periodic health exam, about every three years for a woman in her 20s and 30s, and every year for women 40 and older.
3. Women should examine their own breasts to become familiar with how their breasts normally feel. Any changes should be promptly reported to their health-care providers. Don't procrastinate.
4. Women who have a strong family history, a genetic tendency, or have already had breast cancer should talk with their doctors about the benefits and limitations of starting mammography screening earlier, of having more frequent clinical exams, or of having additional screening tests such as a breast ultrasound or MRI.

While the search for a cure continues, these screening guidelines have proven to be useful for increasing the likelihood of detecting breast cancer at an early stage, thereby facilitating a good response to treatment. But their benefit depends on adherence.

Far too many Holy Spirit-led women are failing to take advantage of these simple and effective screening methods. Don't let fear, myths and old wives tales prevent you from getting a breast exam and mammogram. Become proactive in preserving your health so that you might experience the blessing of a long and healthy life.