



THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY DETECTION IN BREAST CANCER

BY DR. MICHELE LEY, MD, FACS

Breast cancer remains one of the most common cancers among women, but the good news is that early detection can make all the difference. By identifying breast cancer at its earliest stages, treatment options are often less invasive, recovery times can be shorter, and survival rates are significantly higher.

Why Early Detection?

Early detection means finding breast cancer before it has spread beyond the breast. This can be achieved through regular screenings, imaging, and physical exams.

When breast cancer is caught early, patients often benefit from less aggressive treatments, less invasive treatments. This can mean shorter recovery times and improved quality of life.

According to the American Cancer Society, the five-year relative survival rate for localized breast cancer is 99 percent. Once cancer spreads to nearby lymph nodes, that number drops to 87 percent, and if it spreads to other areas of the body, the rate decreases to 32 percent. These statistics show why detecting breast cancer at the earliest stage is so critical.

Early detection also gives patients more control in their treatment journey. It creates the opportunity to plan a course of care that fits their lifestyle, needs, and personal goals while improving outcomes.

When should monitoring start?

Every woman should be mindful of her breast health, and self-awareness is essential. Noticing changes such as lumps, skin dimpling, persistent pain, or nipple changes should always prompt a discussion with a healthcare provider.

Some may need to begin monitoring earlier, especially those with a family history, genetic mutation or other risk factors. Tucson Breast Health Specialists encourages patients to talk with their physicians about their risk for breast cancer and when to start screenings and how often they should occur.

Women at average risk should begin annual mammograms at age 40, while those at higher risk may need additional imaging or genetic testing at an earlier age. Mammograms should continue yearly. There are some recommenda-



tions that patients may have mammograms every 1-2 years over age 55. There is no set age to stop mammogram screenings. At Tucson Breast Health Specialists, we recommend annual mammography after the age of 40, and for as long as you are in good health.

Men are also at risk for breast cancer: about 1/100 new diagnoses are in men. Because they do not have routine screening, they often are diagnosed by finding a mass in their breast. Men can also inherit a predisposition to breast cancer or a genetic mutation for breast cancer from their family. Being aware of your body

and your family history can help identify problems earlier.

There are several ways to detect breast cancer early:

- 3D mammograms remain the gold standard for screening.
- MRI can be helpful for women with dense breast tissue or higher-than-average risk; whole breast ultrasound can be helpful, but MRI is more effective at identifying small cancers.
- Clinical breast exams performed by a provider can detect abnormalities that may not show up on imaging.
- Self-exams allow women to become familiar with their breast tissue and notice changes early.

For women at higher risk, a surveillance plan may include annual 3D mammography, alternating with annual screening MRI. MRI is particularly valuable for patients with dense breast tissue, where mammograms alone may not be as effective.

To learn more about Dr. Ley and Tucson Breast Health Specialists, please visit their website at www.tucsonbreasthealth.com



Dr. Michele Ley, MD, FACS, a board-certified breast surgical oncologist, has cared for women in Tucson since 2006. She has

trained at some of the nation's top institutions and has served as medical director for major breast programs in the region.

Beyond her impressive credentials, Dr. Ley brings a deeply personal perspective to her work. As a breast cancer survivor diagnosed at age 44 through high-risk screening, she understands firsthand the importance of catching breast cancer early. Her own journey allows her to provide not only advanced surgical care but also compassionate, reassuring support to each patient.

The team at Tucson Breast Health Specialists work together to ensure every patient receives a personalized plan, from early detection strategies to treatment options designed for the best possible outcomes.