

Breast Cancer Screenings Save Lives

Breast cancer is the most common cancer affecting women in New York; but, with early detection and treatment, chances of survival are good.

October is National Breast Cancer Awareness month, and Affinity wants to remind all their cisgender female and transgender male members to sign up for a breast exam. Remember, **a breast exam is not the same as a mammogram**. During a breast or chest exam, a doctor will feel for lumps or other irregularities on and around the breast tissue, and will recommend other tests if something seems unusual. This is typically a part of your annual wellness visit.

Starting in their twenties, women should get a breast exam from their doctor every 1 to 3 years. After 40, it must be every year. Don't be afraid to ask your doctor for a chest exam, and bring up any concerns right away. Early diagnosis could be a matter of life or death.



Is there anything you can do to prevent breast cancer? Sadly no, but you can reduce your risk by:

- Exercising regularly and staying at a healthy weight
- Drinking very little alcohol or none at all
- Avoiding cigarettes

John Diamond, English journalist and broadcaster, said, "Cancer is a word, not a sentence." Patients, providers, and care plans must all work together to make sure that a cancer diagnosis does not become a life sentence.

REFERENCES:

- <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/cancer/breast-cancer>
- <https://www.ny.gov/programs/get-screened-no-excuses>

Flu Season Is Here

By Dr. Scott Breidbart
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When it comes to infectious diseases, influenza or flu, doesn't usually generate much interest. On the other hand, Ebola kills almost all infected people and was the main character in a best-selling book. Tuberculosis or consumption is worldwide, continuously threatens to become immune to all treatments, and has killed many famous people, from artists to politicians. Polio killed and paralyzed, and launched the March of Dimes. Its vaccine – along with that of smallpox – is one of the great triumphs of medicine.

But flu? Flu doesn't command the same level of fear and loathing. It's common – everyone gets it at one time or another. People usually feel miserable for a week, and unless they are old, young, immune suppressed, or very unlucky, recover with nothing worse than the ire of the co-workers they infected. The flu season lasts from fall into the early spring, similar to hockey season, and like hockey, some seasons start later and there are good and bad years. Experts cannot predict whether the season will start early, last a long time, or kill more people than usual.

So, while it may not win a Golden Globe for worst infectious disease, you still DO NOT want to get the flu. You will feel rotten. If you are old, young, or have a poor immune system, the flu can kill you. If you spread it to a friend, neighbor or colleague who is fighting cancer, arthritis, asthma, diabetes, kidney disease or who had a transplant, it can pose a highly serious threat to their health.

So how can you avoid the flu? **Get a flu vaccine.** Stay away from sick people or people who are complaining that they just feel achy and feverish. Don't touch them. Don't shake their hands. Don't let them cough on you. Wash your hands. **Get a flu vaccine.**

Last winter's flu vaccine was about 60 percent effective for adolescents. In comparison, statins don't reduce death from heart disease by 60 percent. Even seat belts don't reduce crash-related injuries by 60 percent. The flu vaccine is recommended for just about everyone over the age of six months. **Get a flu vaccine.** And plead (if you must) with your family, friends and neighbors to get a flu vaccine if they haven't already. That's what I'm doing.



Tips for Taking Your Medications

Affinity has thousands of members who take statins for managing (bad) cholesterol and for keeping a healthy heart. It's very important that if you are prescribed a statin, or any medication, you discuss the reasons and the treatment with your doctor, and take it as it was prescribed to you!

Affinity wants to help you stay on course with your medications. That's why, if you are on a statin, you will be receiving a robocall when your prescription is due. We're sorry to bother you, but your health is important to us! If after receiving the robocall you still forget to pick up your pills, we'll send you a letter AND we'll let your prescriber (doctor) know.

If you have any concerns about your medications, you should call your doctor right away. The CVS/Caremark team can also help, and they can be reached at **855.465.0031**.

Remembering when and how to take medication can be difficult, but there are ways to make it easier. The following ideas might help:

1. Make a list of all your medications and keep that list in a safe place you won't forget. If you're comfortable with computers, save the list there.

Remember to include:

- The names of the medications
- What the medications treat
- How often you take a pill
- How often each prescription is refilled
- Whether to take a medication with food
- Whether you can drink alcohol while taking a medication
- What to do if you miss a dose

If you don't know the answer to any of these questions, ask your pharmacist.

2. Get a pill dispenser. They come in all different sizes, and you can get one that separates pills by the time of day you take them. Make a reminder in your calendar, or set a repeating alarm on your phone, for when you need to take a pill.

3. Keep your pill bottles. If you have trouble keeping a list, or if you want a backup, you should keep your pill bottles with the labels still on. When you visit your doctor, bring all your pill bottles and your doctor can make sure your records are up to date. It's absolutely necessary for your health and safety that all your doctors know every single medication you take!

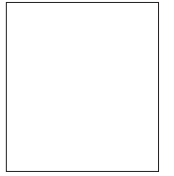
4. Use one pharmacy. If you use one pharmacy, then the pharmacist knows everything you take, and can help keep you safe. Medications keep you healthy, but only if they're taken correctly.

No matter what, remember to discuss all your medications (and supplements) with your doctor. Help your doctor take the best care of you!



REFERENCES:

- **Arthritis Foundation:** <https://www.arthritis.org/living-with-arthritis/treatments/medication/safety/medication-management.php>
- **Aging In Place:** <https://www.aginginplace.org/a-comprehensive-guide-to-medication-management/>
- **NIH:** <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/topics/medicines-and-medication-management>



Pre Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) Reduces Risk of HIV Infection

Pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP, is a daily pill people who do not have HIV but who are at high risk of getting it can take to prevent HIV infection or becoming HIV positive. The medication works to prevent the virus from developing into a permanent infection in those who are exposed to HIV through sex and/or injection drug use.

Research shows that people who use PrEP daily are 99% less likely to become infected with the HIV virus through sex. For individuals who inject drugs, PrEP reduces the risk of getting HIV by at least 74% if taken on a daily basis.

PrEP does not protect against other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

KEY THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is an antiretroviral drug (ARV) taken daily by HIV-negative people to protect themselves from infection.
- Evidence shows that PrEP greatly reduces the chances of HIV infection.
- PrEP's effectiveness decreases rapidly if not taken regularly as prescribed, so addressing the reasons for non-compliance are key to its success.
- PrEP does not protect against other sexually transmitted infections. Therefore, other measures need to be taken in order to prevent transmission of other sexually transmitted infections.

For more information and resources on PrEP visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/prep.html>.

