Teens’ Questions about Breast Cancer

Q: What is breast cancer?

A: Breast cancer occurs when breast cells become abnormal and divide without control or order. Breast cancer is the most common form of cancer among women in the United States.

Q: What is a tumor?

A: A mass or lump of extra tissue is called a tumor. It can be either benign or malignant. Benign tumors are not cancerous. Malignant tumors are cancerous.

Q: Is breast cancer common in teens?

A: Breast cancer does not often occur in teens. However, it is important to take care of your body now. Knowledge of familial history is also important.

Q: What are the symptoms of breast cancer? How will I know if I have breast cancer?

A: Warning signs include a lump, thickening or swelling, change of shape, appearance of dimples, or discharge from the nipple.

Q: If I had a lump in my breast does this mean that I have breast cancer?

A: Only 20% of lumps are found to be cancerous. It is normal for your breasts to feel slightly lumpy or uneven. It is important to conduct self-examinations while you are young so that you know what your healthy breast feels like. Therefore, you will notice any irregularities at a later time.

Q: Is there a cure for breast cancer?

A: While there is still no known cure for breast cancer, there are several treatment options. Methods of treatment include surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, and hormonal therapy.

Q: What are the known risk factors?

A: Some possible risk factors cannot be changed; for example, family history and early onset of menstruation. Other possible risk factors can be controlled, like lack of exercise, obesity, dietary fat, smoking, and alcohol consumption.

Q: If my family has a history of breast cancer should I be concerned?

A: Family history of breast cancer is a known risk factor. However, all women are at risk for developing breast cancer. Over 70% of breast cancer occurs in women who have no known risk factors.

Q: Does incidence of breast cancer relate to breast size?

A: Large breast size does not increase the risk of breast cancer, but it may make diagnosis more difficult.
Q: If I injure my breast will I be more likely to get breast cancer?

A: Breast cancer is not caused by bumping, bruising or touching the breast. However, if your breast does not heal you should see your doctor.

Q: Are there preventative measures that I can take to reduce the risk of breast cancer?

A: Exercise and a healthy diet have been proven to reduce the risk of breast cancer. Annual physical exams are recommended. You must learn to take care of your developing body. Ask your doctor or school nurse about information on how to perform breast self-exams.

Q: What is mammography? Does it hurt?

A: Mammography involves the use of x-rays to create a picture of the breast. A mammogram is slightly uncomfortable, but it is the best diagnostic tool that we have.

Q: When should I go for my first mammogram?

A: Although you should discuss your medical history with your physician, it is recommended that women should go for a baseline mammogram between the ages of 35 and 40.