



Breast Cancer

January 5, 2014 [Dr. Kela Henry](#)

October is Breast Cancer awareness month, so let's review a little about the disease and focus on the guidelines for screening. Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in American women. Once found, breast cancer can be treated with surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, or some combination of the three. Screening mammograms, although not any woman's favorite test, are valuable tools for detecting breast cancer. I believe doctors and patients would prefer the MRI test, but it is quite expensive, and insurance usually will not cover it. At this point in the health care practice MRI is not routinely used for screening.

Due to the uncertainty surrounding the current healthcare climate, there has been some confusion about breast cancer screenings and what is appropriate. In the past, the guidelines were the following: a baseline mammogram between the ages of 35-40, one every two years from 40-49 and one yearly starting at age 50. However, if a woman found a lump, or she had a very strong family history of breast cancer, (i.e.; mother diagnosed before age 40) then a mammogram was performed earlier and more frequently.

The [United States Preventative Task Force \(USPSTF\)](#) last provided an update to these guidelines in 2009 and is expected to update again soon. The USPSTF recommends the following:

- Mammograms before the age of 50 should be customized to the patient. She and her doctor should discuss the potential benefits and harms of the exam and take into consideration her risk factors and history.
- Mammograms should be ordered every two years for women ages 50-74. However, most women in this age group and their insurance companies actually expect annual mammograms, and this is still current clinical practice.
- In women 75 years of age and older there is not enough evidence to assess the harm or benefit of doing mammograms.

Ultimately breast cancer screening is best considered between the individual patient and her doctor. If you're in the Atlanta area, feel free to come and discuss your breast cancer concerns with us at Emory Gwinnett Family Physicians.

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