

Leader Talking Points: Breast Cancer

- Breast cancer is the most diagnosed cancer in women after skin cancer and the leading cause of cancer death among women in most countries around the world.
- Breast cancer occurs almost entirely in women, but men can get breast cancer, too.
- Symptoms of breast cancer vary, and often there are no symptoms during early stages, but some warning signs include a new lump in the breast or underarm, thickening or swelling of part of the breast, irritation or dimpling of breast skin, redness or flaky skin around the nipple/breast, pulling in of the nipple or pain in the nipple area, nipple discharge (other than breast milk), any change in size or shape of the breast, and pain in any area of the breast.
- Many conditions can cause lumps in the breast, including cancer. But most breast lumps are caused by other medical conditions.
- Inherent risk factors of breast cancer include being a woman, getting older (most breast cancers are found in women 50+), genetic mutations (e.g., BRCA1, BRCA2), starting menstrual periods before age 12 and starting menopause after age 55, having dense breasts, personal history of breast cancer or certain breast diseases, family history of breast or ovarian cancer, previous radiation therapy to the chest/breasts, and taking/in-utero exposure to the drug diethylstilbestrol (DES) (given to some pregnant women in the U.S. between 1940-1971 to prevent miscarriage).
- Risk factors of breast cancer that can be modified/controlled include physical inactivity, being overweight or obese after menopause, taking hormones, reproductive history (having first pregnancy after age 30, not breastfeeding, and never having a full-term pregnancy), and drinking alcohol.
- Taking care of your health throughout your life by maintaining a healthy weight, exercising regularly, and avoiding alcohol can help lower risk of developing breast cancer and improve your chances of surviving if it does occur.
- Breast cancer is sometimes found after symptoms appear, but many women with breast cancer have no symptoms—which is why regular breast cancer screening is so important!
- For most women, the best way to detect breast cancer early is a mammogram—an X-ray of the breast. The USPSTF recommends every-other-year screening mammography for women aged 50 to 74 years. Along with their doctor, some women may decide to begin screening as early as age 40.
- Having a mammogram is uncomfortable for most women, but the discomfort is short-lived and may save your life!
- Talk to your healthcare provider to learn more about lowering your risk and preventing breast cancer.
- **U.S. EMPLOYEES: Caterpillar active U.S. employee health plans cover mammograms at 100 percent—meaning no out-of-pocket costs to you! Certain age and risk factor requirements may apply, so contact your insurance carrier to learn the details about your benefit.**