



It is estimated that this year alone, more than 2,000 Arkansans will be diagnosed with breast cancer. Statistics also tell us 420 Arkansans may die as a direct result.

Other than skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common cancer among American women.

As many of you know, October is breast cancer awareness month. It is a good time to remind Arkansans of the importance of mammograms for early detection and life style changes that could help prevent cancer.

The United States Preventive Services Task Force recommends that if you are 50 to 74 years old, be sure to have a mammogram every two years. If you are 40 to 49 years old, talk to your doctor about when to start and how often to get a screening mammogram.

Can't afford a mammogram? If you have a low income or do not have insurance and are between the ages of 40 and 64, you may qualify for a free or low-cost mammogram through CDC's National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program. To learn more, call (800) CDC-INFO.

This year we passed legislation in hopes of increasing the accessibility of new technology that could help save even more lives.

Act 708 requires insurance companies to cover the cost of a breast ultrasound or 3-D mammogram without charging a co-pay or deductible.

While traditional mammograms are effective for many women, the ultrasound can detect changes in women with dense breast tissue.

States that have demanded that insurance companies treat ultrasounds and 3-D mammograms the same as traditional mammograms have seen a reduction in deaths and the number of biopsies needed.

Not all clinics in the state currently offer the technology, so ask your doctor about the possible benefits for you and accessibility.

When it comes to lowering your risk of breast cancer, the Center for Disease Control recommends the following:

- Keep a healthy weight.
- Exercise regularly (at least four hours a week).
- Don't drink alcohol, or limit alcoholic drinks to no more than one per day.
- Avoid exposure to chemicals that can cause cancer (carcinogens).
- Breastfeed your babies, if possible.
- Try to reduce your exposure to radiation during medical tests like mammograms, X-rays, CT scans, and PET scans.
- If you are taking, or have been told to take, hormone replacement therapy or oral contraceptives (birth control pills), ask your doctor about the risks and find out if it is right for you.

Thanks to earlier detection and better treatments, a woman's risk of dying of breast cancer dropped 38 percent between the late 1980s and 2014, translating into 297,300 fewer breast cancer deaths during that time. We look forward to even more progress in years to come.

