



Mammograms and PSA tests; Is there a question?

Honest Health

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I'll be honest. I haven't had a mammogram in years and I don't plan on scheduling one anytime soon.

If you are shocked, don't be.

"I've never had a mammogram in my life," my 84-year-old friend Pamela, a World War II pilot, and former big game hunter, muttered under her breath, "but don't tell anyone."

So she and I were interested last week to read about a new study advising men to avoid an annual PSA test for prostate cancer; any subsequent treatment may be worse than the disease, warned the authors. We both agreed that screening mammograms are too often inaccurate and can also push women into unnecessary or "over treatment."

Always looking for more research that supports my no e-mammogram stand, I was delighted to read a number of European studies where women in their 50s and 60s who did monthly self exams, had annual clinical exams and annual mammograms, ended up with the exact same mortality rate from breast cancer as those who only did a monthly self exam and an annual clinical exam; they ignored the mammogram routine. In other words, the women who did not have annual mammograms had the same chance of not dying from breast cancer, as those who had annual mammograms!

But now I realized that if I wanted to responsibly crow about replacing mammograms with effective self-screening, I needed to get serious about doing a monthly self exam.

It was hard at first; I would tense up, grit my teeth and maybe examine my breasts in the shower. But things got easier once I dropped my "exam" mentality after reading about breast massage.

Here is a way for you or your partner to stimulate the flow of lymph fluids throughout your breasts. Regular breast massage helps cleanse your breasts of any extra estrogen manufactured by your fatty breast cells or chemicals estrogens from body lotions, chlorinated water or from the cheddar cheese with rBGH you still eat, because it is cheaper than raw milk cheddar.

Then last week, I stumbled over www.feelyourboobies.com and could not stop laughing. Now I know how even more women can become brave and say "yes" to self exams!

Again loving any additional proof that I am not crazy for avoiding mammograms, I became excited last November, when the New York Times ran a front page story describing why one mammogram every 6 years

was more effective than regular screenings.

The 109,000 Norwegian women in this study, who had received a single mammogram in a six year period, had a 22 percent lower incidence of breast cancer, compared to the 119,000 women who had received multiple mammograms during the same six years. The study, published by the AMA's Archives of Internal Medicine, concluded that the body can apparently cleanse itself of mutated breast cells; in other words, the body, if left alone, can sometimes heal itself.

"This simplification of a complicated issue is both overreaching and alarming," said Robert A. Smith, director of breast cancer screening for the American Cancer Society, as he angrily reacted to the new study. Unmoved by any of this new research, the American Cancer Society still recommends that women have annual mammograms, beginning at age 40.

Meanwhile, the American College of Physicians recommends that most women not have screening mammograms until menopause. Why does the ACS disagree with mainstream physicians over the use of mammograms?

Keep your eyes on the ball; follow the money, my Uncle Jack, a manufacturing executive, used to tell me.

Who is receiving the revenues from any particular policy?, my economics professor, Jerry Cohen, used to ask.

The mammography industry is big money — possibly 36 billion a year in the U.S. alone. A look at the board members of the American Cancer Society's Foundation, which only accepts donations over \$1 million, often from pharmaceutical and radiology companies, may influence the society's mammography policy. But who knows for sure?

Back in 1980, poet and feminist activist Audre Lorde wrote, "We live in a profit economy and there is no profit in the prevention of cancer; there is only profit in the treatment of cancer."

And now we have the alarming fact that mammograms are fairly useless in detecting the fast growing triple negative breast cancer now being diagnosed in women under 50, including a disproportionate number of young African American moms under 40. Most women diagnosed with any of these → aggressive estrogen negative → tumors or even → a thickened or spread-out lobular tumor can receive a negative mammogram one month, but personally discover an invasive cancer → just a few weeks later.

"Mammograms are not very helpful," said Tracy, a 48-year-old mother of three, as she described her stage 3 lobular breast cancer diagnosis, one month after her annual mammogram.

"Hello?" said Tracy, a banking executive. "Forget those annual mammograms; just get to know your own breasts; stay in close contact with how they look and feel."

So, when it comes to checking up on my own breast health, I will continue to choose the safest and most relevant screening techniques I know, an annual clinical exam, along with the advice of my new friends over at feelyourboobies.com.

Who says anymore that self exams are a bore?

Susan Wadia- Ells, a resident of Manchester, is founder and director of the national non profit organization, Know Breast Cancer. www.knowbreastcancer.net. She also writes the blog www.thetruthaboutbreastcancer.com.

Additional Resources:

Keeping aBreast: Ways to STOP Breast Cancer, Kahlid Mahmud MD, 2005.

The Healthy Breast Guide: A 10 minute self-massage for Body, Mind and Soulm Katharina Wehrli, www.earthlit.com, 2008.

The Secret History of the War on Cancer, Devra Davis PhD, Basic Books, 2007.

The Cancer Journals, Audre Lorde, Spinster Ink, 1980.

The Complete Natural Medicine Guide to Breast Cancer: A Practical Manual for Understanding, Prevention and Care, Sat Dharam Kaur ND, Robert Rose, Toronto, 2004.

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