

Free Cancer Tests, because Every Woman Counts

If every adult woman had screening tests according to the guidelines of the American Cancer Society, far fewer women would die from breast or cervical cancer or suffer from the impact of late-stage disease.

Women over the age 21, or those who have been having vaginal intercourse for three years, should have a Pap smear annually to age 30. After three consecutive normal tests, a Pap smear may be done every two-three years. A Pap smear is a test, done by a physician or nurse practitioner, in which, during a pelvic exam, a small amount of tissue is swabbed from the cervix. Then the smear is analyzed under a microscope. If abnormal cervical cells are detected, further tests are done to determine if it is cancer. Although, like most cancers, the incidence of cervical cancer is higher in older adults, when it is detected and treated early, the chance for full recovery is quite good.

Women over the age of 40 should have a clinical breast exam and a mammogram annually. In a clinical exam, the doctor manually palpates the breasts to feel for lumps. A mammogram is a low-dose x-ray of the breast done with a special machine. A radiologist carefully scrutinizes the x-ray to find questionable areas. When breast cancers are detected early and treated appropriately, the chance for full recovery is quite good.

Because these tests are so important, no woman needs to go without them because she can't afford the cost. Medicare Part B, Medi-Cal, and private insurance cover pap smears and mammograms, with the same co-pay requirements as any medical visit.

For those who are uninsured or under-insured, and whose household income falls below 200% of the federal poverty level, the Federal and State governments, under the "Every Woman Counts" program, provides these tests free of charge. A woman needs only to call **1-800-511-2300**. A female specialist, who speaks one of six different languages, will ask a series of eligibility questions. If the caller qualifies, she will be referred to a local primary physician, who will do a Pap smear and/or clinical breast exam. The physician will refer her to a radiology facility for a screening mammogram. If any of these tests should show an abnormality, follow-up tests will be done free of charge to the patient. Should cancer be detected, the woman's treatment will be funded by another government program.

All women should have these tests, but seniors are especially vulnerable to cancer, and should never think they are too old or cannot afford these tests. **EVERY WOMAN COUNTS!**

For questions about cancer, call the American Cancer Society at **949-261-9446 – Option 3**

For any other questions regarding senior health, call Office on Aging's health educator at **1-800-510-2020**