



October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Early detection and screenings with mammography can save lives. In women, breast cancer is the second most common cause of cancer deaths. The numbers of deaths have declined over the last decade partly because of increased screening. The best screening test is a mammogram, essentially a breast x-ray. Mammograms are recommended for women starting at age 50. A mammogram can be performed at a VA facility, or your doctor can refer you to a nearby center for a mammogram. Breast cancer screening is an important benchmark for quality of care. In 2008 the VA scored higher in this quality measure than non-VA facilities.

Depending on your risk factors or your physical examination, your doctor may recommend a mammogram at an earlier age. Understanding your family and personal history of cancers is an important aspect in evaluating your risk. If you have a mother, sister, or daughter with breast cancer, ask your doctor about your risk of getting breast cancer and how you can lower your risk.

In addition, you can lower your risk of breast cancer by:

- Controlling your weight and exercise.
- Understanding the risks and benefits of hormone replacement therapy.
- Limiting the amount of alcohol you drink.

We encourage you to ask your provider about mammography.

Women are now the fastest growing subgroup of U.S. Veterans. The number of women Veterans is expected to increase dramatically in the next 10 years, and VA health care is in high demand by the women Veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. The Department of Veterans Affairs understands the health care needs of women Veterans and is committed to meeting these needs. Women Veterans served and they deserve the best quality care.