

To Beat Breast Cancer - Prevention is Key

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Breast cancer is a malignant tumor that starts from cells of the breast and will affect one in eight women. At St. Mary's Hospital, breast cancer accounts for approximately 33 percent of all cancer diagnoses, said Joan Popielski, registered nurse, program administrator and director of the hospital's Cancer Care and Infusion Services.

"Testing done on a regular basis is the best way for women to lower their risk of dying from breast cancer," Popielski said. "The earlier the cancer is detected, the better the outcome can be."

To help with detection, the hospital recently purchased a breast coil for one of its MRI machines, allowing for very detailed examination of dense breasts or breast abnormalities. The breast coil is a piece of equipment into which the breasts are gently placed that sends and receives radio waves within the magnetic field of an MRI machine to create images.

MRI breast imaging helps identify early breast cancer, especially in high-risk patients, said Dr. Premal Sanghavi, a surgeon and member of St. Mary's Hospital's Medical Staff. It also can help evaluate abnormalities, determine whether cancer has spread and assess chemotherapy's effects, among other benefits. Breast MRI is especially valuable because it offers information about breast conditions that cannot be learned through mammography or ultrasound, such as small breast lesions, said Dr. Sanghavi. MRI can also image breast implants, which are hard to image using traditional mammography.

"I think it's a very good test to have for people... with dense breasts," said Dr. Sanghavi, who recently completed a fellowship in breast cancer surgery from the University of Southern California Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center. The breast coil is very sensitive and is widely used across the country, she said, and is frequently used for follow-up treatments.

For more information, please call the hospital's Imaging Department at (301) 475-6106.

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