

Our Breast Cancer Risk Assessment Program

Why you should participate

Women coming to select Barnes-Jewish facilities for their annual screening mammogram may choose to receive an additional free benefit — a “personalized” breast cancer risk assessment that determines each woman’s overall risk of developing breast cancer and potential modifiable risk factors.

The risk assessment consists of a short questionnaire, which is combined with each woman’s individual breast density assessment obtained during their screening mammogram. The risk assessment is used to identify women who are at an elevated risk for developing breast cancer so that preventive measures can be determined and communicated. Once complete, a copy of the results are sent to both the patient and their health care provider.

“Even low-risk women require continued screening for early detection of cancer,” says epidemiologist Graham Colditz, MD, who developed the questionnaire. Colditz is a professor of surgery at Washington University and associate director of prevention and control for Siteman Cancer Center at Barnes-Jewish Hospital and Washington University School of Medicine.

“Low risk doesn’t mean no risk. Knowing one’s risk of developing breast cancer can also enable a woman to participate in preventive strategies,” says Colditz. “For example, women at very high risk with a strong family history of breast cancer may benefit from genetic counseling. Those at high risk, but below the very-high level, may consider medication that can significantly reduce risk, and women at above average-to-high risk can benefit from exercise and weight loss.”

What’s also important to know is that the risk assessment developed by Colditz was found to be superior to the Gail Model, a questionnaire that’s widely used by many other hospitals and imaging centers. “We have included more of the established risk factors that change a women's risk of breast cancer than tools such as the Gail Model. With these added details included in our model, we have a better ability to spread out risk and identify those at higher risk who may benefit most from prevention strategies,” he says.

The personalized breast cancer risk assessment is available at the Joanne Knight Breast Health Center at the Center for Advanced Medicine (CAM), the Highlands, Barnes-Jewish West County Outpatient Radiology Center, and the Siteman Cancer Center mammography van.

For questions regarding the personalized breast cancer risk assessment program or a patient's results, contact nurse coordinator Pat Fisher, BSN, RN, at 314-747-2667 or patricia.fisher@wustl.edu.

Rosner B, Colditz GA. *Breast Cancer Research and Treatment* 2013 Nov: 142(1):187-202