There is no denying that breast cancer is a scary term. According to the American Cancer Society, breast cancer is the most common cancer in American women and the second leading cause of death in women. Sadly, about one in 37 women will die from this disease and/or its complications.

The moment a person is diagnosed with breast cancer, they often question what the future holds. Breast cancer is an ever-changing landscape with more research being performed every day to find a cure.

Research has led to breast cancer becoming a disease attacked through a multidisciplinary approach. The multidisciplinary team consists of a surgeon, medical oncologist, and a radiation oncologist. Surgical treatment options have drastically changed.

When surgeons first began treating breast cancer, all patients would receive a radical mastectomy. A radical mastectomy is the removal of all breast tissue, chest wall muscles, and lymph nodes in the armpit. The radical mastectomy gave way to the modified radical mastectomy, which allowed patients to keep their chest wall muscles; however they still lost all their breast tissue and lymph nodes.

Though the modified radical mastectomy is still an appropriate treatment for some breast cancer patients, lumpectomy and sentinel lymph node biopsy are now an option. A lumpectomy involves removing just the tumor and a small amount of surrounding breast tissue. The sentinel lymph node biopsy has saved many patients from the long-term complications associated with the complete removal of the armpit lymph nodes. Your surgeon should thoroughly discuss each of these different surgical options with you.
Aside from changing the way breast cancer is treated, research has led to identifying modifiable risk factors associated with breast cancer. According to the American Cancer Society, the lifestyle factors related to increased breast cancer risk are drinking alcohol, being overweight or obese after menopause, not having children or having children after the age of 30, birth control use (though that risk decreases after the birth control is discontinued), and hormone replacement therapy after menopause.

Currently, the best defense against breast cancer is early detection. Monthly breast exams and following a mammogram schedule based off your own breast cancer risk factors are at the top of the list for early detection.

Learn your body and understand your risk factors. If you have any questions or concerns about something that doesn’t feel right or about your risk factors, please discuss them with your primary care physician immediately.

Again, early detection gives you the best opportunity for a cure. Let’s stand together and work to decrease the death rate of breast cancer to zero.

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