

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 27 million women in the U.S. have a physical disability. A disability is a health condition that can make it hard to do daily tasks.

Women who are disabled are just as likely to get breast cancer as other women. Yet they tend to get screened for breast cancer less often than women without disabilities. Every woman needs to have regular screening tests.

Barriers to screening for women with disabilities

A main barrier to breast cancer screening is lack of access. It may be hard for some disabled women to get to a mammography center. Many centers (especially mammography vans) may not be designed for women who have trouble getting around. Mammography equipment may not adjust enough for some women to easily get into the right position or to sit (if needed).



Mammography tips for women with disabilities

- Call mammography centers in your area to find one that meets your needs.
- Find a doctor who is sensitive to your needs. Ask your friends, family members and other disabled women for a referral.
- When you schedule your mammogram, let the staff know about your disability. It helps to talk about this up front since some places may not be right for you. For instance, if you find it hard to stand, ask if you can sit instead. Let the staff know if you need a sign language interpreter. If you can, tell them where to find one.
- Bring a friend or someone you trust. They may be able to help.
- If you are not happy with the services you receive, speak up. This may help increase access for you and others. Too often, clinics don't know how to improve their services to meet their patients' needs.

If you can, get to know the way your breasts normally look and feel. This will help you know when something has changed. Report any changes to your doctor. Also, talk to your doctor about a clinical breast exam if you are not given one at your yearly check-up.

Breast cancer treatment and recovery

There are many ways a disability can affect breast cancer treatment and recovery. For instance, it may be hard to travel to a hospital for treatment that's far from home. Or, an upper body disability can make it hard to manage lymphedema if she can't massage her arm.

Think about issues such as:

- Are your muscles weak?
- Can you walk?
- Do you use crutches?
- Are you fatigued often?

Look at yourself as a whole person. Share your concerns with your doctor. Together you can find a way to treat your breast cancer that meets your needs.

Resources

Susan G. Komen®
1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636)
www.komen.org

American Association on Health and Disability (AAHD)
301-545-6140
<http://www.aahd.us/>

Office on Women's Health (OWH)
1-800-994-9662
www.womenshealth.gov

Women with Disabilities (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
1-800-232-4636
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/women.html>

Getting involved

You know best how to improve facilities, medical equipment and doctor-patient relations. Use your voice. If access to health care for the disabled isn't as good as it could be in your area, speak up. Talk with your local medical centers, health insurance providers and elected officials.

What is Komen doing?

Susan G. Komen® and the American Association on Health and Disability (AAHD) are working together to address and remove barriers to screening, diagnosis and treatment for women with disabilities. Komen and AAHD developed Project Accessibility: Removing Barriers for Women with Disabilities. A free, online Breast Health Accessibility Resource Portal to improve access to breast care in Washington, D.C.

It includes materials to help Komen grantees improve their ability to care for women with disabilities. Through Project Accessibility USA, we are changing the status quo for women with disabilities and ensuring access to quality breast cancer care for all.

To learn more about Project Accessibility USA, please contact nationalcapitalarea@komen.org

Related fact sheets in this series:

- Breast Cancer Screening & Follow-up Tests
- Lymphedema
- Support After A Breast Cancer Diagnosis
- Talking With Your Doctor