

# Mother Knows Best

BY TIFFANY AUVINEN

After three years of consistent nagging, Kathy Santini's mother finally convinced her to have her first-ever mammogram when she was 43 years old in 1999. Kathy's doctor discovered she had breast cancer, the second leading cause of cancer death (29 per cent) and the No. 1 cancer cause of death for women under 50.

"I felt like I just wanted to run when I was getting my biopsy," says Kathy, who is among one in nine women who develop breast cancer in their lifetime. "Once my doctor told me I had cancer, I couldn't absorb any information."

This year in B.C., an estimated 2,700 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer. Today, Kathy is cancer-free and an advocate for mammograms. She gets a check-up once a year to ensure her health.

The Canadian Cancer Society suggests that women should be familiar with their breasts so they know what is normal or abnormal for them. Many women find their own cancers, and an awareness of what is normal for their breasts was an important factor. Women should look and feel for any changes in their breasts, but don't need to follow a particular technique or schedule.

"When I was diagnosed with cancer, I wasn't living life to its fullest," says Kathy. "My mother had told me that cancer is a gift wrapped in ugly wrapping paper. Now I understand what she meant because I've made a lot of changes in my life."

She used to work in communications for the government and newspapers on Vancouver Island. After finishing her cancer treatments, Kathy did humanitarian work in Sierra Leone and Afghanistan. She even had the opportunity to spend the last week of her mother's life caring for her at her sister's home, a time she describes as magical. Kathy also went sailing through the Caribbean and the Bahamas.

After making huge life changes, she then decided to take a course to become

a life and business coach. "It's all about empowering people to make the best choices in their lives," she says. Kathy has also written a book called, *Live Your Best Life Now!: The Cancer Survivor's Guide to Creating a Happy, Meaningful Life*.

Kathy is living proof there's a wonderful life to be lived after cancer.

## What is breast cancer?

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in Canadian women. It can also be found in men but this is rare. Almost all breast cancers start in the glandular tissue of the breast and are known as adenocarcinomas. Cancer cells may start within the ducts (ductal carcinoma) or lobules (lobular carcinoma). Ductal carcinoma is the most common type of breast cancer.

When breast cancer is diagnosed early, the cancer cells may be very small and found only in the ducts or lobules and are called in situ cancers. If diagnosed before the cells have invaded the surrounding tissue, there is no risk of them spreading after they have been removed. Most in situ cancers are diagnosed with mammograms because they do not form a lump. When the cancer spreads out of the duct or lobule, it is called an invasive cancer and may still be treated effectively if diagnosed early.


## Prevention

Based on the Canadian Cancer Society's current knowledge, opportunities for women to reduce breast cancer risk include: eating a healthy diet, physical activity, healthy body weight maintenance, minimizing alcohol consumption and avoiding non-essential hormones.

## Signs and symptoms of breast cancer

For most women, finding a lump in their breast is the most common sign of breast cancer. If it's tender but not painful, it's usually a symptom of a benign condition and should be checked by a doctor. A lump is sometimes found during a clinical breast examination or at a mammogram.

Other signs might include a lump or swelling in the armpit; changes in breast size or shape; dimpling or puckering of the skin, or thickening and dimpling skin – sometimes called orange peel. Redness, swelling and increased warmth in the affected breast; inverted nipple, and crusting or scaling on the nipple, can also be signs of breast cancer.

The Canadian Cancer Society is a national, community-based organization of volunteers whose mission is to eradicate cancer and enhance the quality of life for people living with cancer. Visit [www.cancer.ca](http://www.cancer.ca) to learn more. 



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