

Young women often delay looking into breast symptoms, research finds

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Young women who find a lump or other potential signs of breast cancer

often delay for weeks before finally seeing a doctor, a new study shows.

On average, young women waited two weeks before seeing a doctor about troubling [breast symptoms](#), researchers found. One-third of young breast cancer patients waited for more than a month to seek care.

These delays can be dangerous, said lead researcher Dr. Katherine Fleshner, a doctor with the University of Calgary in Canada.

"Because [young women](#) typically do not undergo regular screening mammography and because the disease is rare in this population, patients are usually diagnosed at a later stage than [older patients](#)," Fleshner said. "They may ignore or dismiss their concerns early on."

"However, their cancers also usually are more aggressive, so seeking [medical care](#) is important," Fleshner added.

For this study, researchers analyzed surveys collected from 1,148 patients between 2015 and 2022 as part of the Reducing the Burden of Breast Cancer in Young Women (RUBY) project.

The [RUBY study](#) involves young breast cancer patients diagnosed prior to their 41st birthday. The average age of participants was 37.

Nearly nine out of 10 patients (89%) in this study had a symptom of breast cancer. Of those, 77% had a lump they could feel in their breast.

Other symptoms can include swelling of the breast, skin dimpling, breast or nipple pain, nipple retraction, nipple discharge and swollen lymph nodes under the arm or near the [collar bone](#), according to the American Cancer Society.

Patients said they delayed seeing a doctor due to lack of concern, waiting

for their next menstrual cycle, reassurance from another health care practitioner, difficulty accessing care or too many competing priorities in their lives.

Practitioner reassurance included informal advice from family or friends in the health care field, or a regular doctor's visit that did not diagnose the problem, researchers said.

"Some [primary care physicians](#) may have difficulty teasing out which symptoms truly need a workup, in part because most young patients present with benign complaints," Fleshner said. "Additionally, potentially some early cancers may be misdiagnosed, or patients who believe they were misdiagnosed may actually have experienced a benign issue and an unrelated cancer develops later on."

Young women were most likely to delay seeing a doctor if they had a painful lump or if they had a close relative who'd had [breast cancer](#), results show.

In those instances, fear or denial might drive patients to delay their care, researchers said.

However, there is good news—once a concerning [symptom](#) was recognized by a doctor, only 10% of patients experienced any further delay in care.

The findings were presented this week at the [American Society of Breast Surgeons annual meeting](#) in Orlando, FL. Findings presented at medical meetings should be considered preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed journal.

Fleshner stressed that women must seek follow-up care for any breast symptoms that persist.

"Even if you have seen a physician, don't dismiss an ongoing abnormality," Fleshner said in a meeting news release. "Advocate for yourself to ensure you get the help you need."

More information: The American Cancer Society has more about [breast cancer symptoms](#).

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