Women must be their own best advocates and take responsibility for their health. A good way to do that is by committing to routine screening exams, such as Pap smears and mammograms, as recommended by your doctor.

You can get more information about mammography at www.SAHealth.com or www.cancer.org. For information about local support groups and community resources, call the Methodist Healthcare HealthLine at (210) 575-0355 or toll-free at 1-800-333-7333.

Always talk to your doctor if you have specific questions and concerns about your health. Remember you should follow your doctor’s advice and orders over anything else you may hear or read.
A mammogram is a safe, low dose x-ray that is able to detect irregularities in the breast that neither you nor your doctor can feel. To take your mammogram, the technologist will have you stand in front of the x-ray machine and place your breast between two plastic plates. These plates will compress your breast while the x-ray is taken.

Note: Do not wear deodorant or powder to your mammogram appointment. These items contain material that can show up on an x-ray.

The technologist will take great care to make you as comfortable as possible, but it is necessary for the breast to be well compressed. Remember, any discomfort will only be for a few seconds.

Screening mammograms are routine tests done yearly for women who do not have any breast disease symptoms. A diagnostic mammogram is done for women who are having breast disease symptoms.

In a diagnostic mammogram, different views are taken to better picture the breast. If you have a diagnostic mammogram, you will be asked to wait while the radiologist, a doctor who is an expert at reading mammograms, views your films. Do not be alarmed if after viewing your films the radiologist wants you to have more mammography views taken, or an ultrasound scan of the breast done to clarify the findings. For most women, these additional studies simply prove that there is no cause for concern.

Symptoms of breast disease include a lump that you can feel, nipple discharge, breast pain, or a suspicious area noted on a screening mammogram.

Reducing Your Risk

You can reduce your risk of breast cancer by adhering to the five commandments of good breast health:

• Do monthly self-exams
• Have a clinical breast exam conducted by a health care professional every year
• Schedule yearly mammograms
• See your doctor immediately if you notice any of the symptoms of breast disease
• Discuss with your doctor your risk factors and ways you can reduce risk

The risk of breast cancer increases sharply with age. The American Cancer Society recommends that you begin having yearly mammograms at age 40 and continue to do so for the rest of your life.

Mammography is the single best method for the early detection of breast cancer.