HEALTHWISE: WOMEN AT HIGH RISK OF BREAST CANCER SHOULD CONSIDER MRIS

Q: I am 43 years old and my sister had breast cancer at age 38. I get mammograms every year, but should I be getting an MRI?

A: New guidelines from the American Cancer Society recommend women who have a high risk for breast cancer should undergo yearly Breast MRI’s in addition to yearly mammograms.

Women may be at high risk if there is breast or ovarian cancer in the family on the mother or father’s side and if the breast cancer developed before age 50; if they have a mutation in the BRCA1 or BRCA2 genes; or have been treated for Hodgkin’s disease. Experts say about 1 in 50 adult U.S. women fall into this category. Also, a new study suggests MRI is useful for women already diagnosed with cancer in one breast.

Because you fall into this category due to your sister’s young age with breast cancer, you should discuss the reasons to order a breast MRI with your primary care physician, breast surgeon or gynecologist. When scheduling a breast MRI, you need to make sure that the center you are going to has dedicated radiologists who specialize in breast imaging and a dedicated breast MRI coil.

At the Breast Imaging Center at Overlook Hospital, we use MRI’s with dedicated breast coils and radiologists who specialize in breast MRI, mammography and ultrasound.

MRIs show abnormal blood flow in the breast, frequently a sign of early cancers not visible on the mammogram. MRI may also be better at detecting breast cancer in women with dense breasts or breast implants.

However, MRIs are not perfect; false positives can run as high as 25% and they are expensive, and not all insurers will pay for them.

Mammography is still considered an excellent screening technique, and it can show things MRIs miss, like calcium deposits, which can occur in patterns that indicate early breast cancer.

For more information about breast imaging options or to schedule an appointment, call the Breast Imaging Center at Overlook Hospital: 908-522-5760.

Dr. Sue Jane Grosso is medical director of the Breast Imaging Center at Overlook Hospital in Summit.

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Part of Atlantic Health, atlantichealth.org, Overlook Hospital is a 504-bed not-for-profit community teaching hospital located in Summit, NJ with more than 1,100 attending physicians. Overlook provides adult and pediatric emergency care, with specialties in emergency cardiac angioplasty and stroke response. Overlook’s Neuroscience Institute is the State’s leader in stroke and brain tumor treatments as the sole provider of the revolutionary Merci® Retriever and CyberKnife®. Overlook Hospital has a designated Bariatric Surgery Center of Excellence, a Minimally Invasive Surgery Program, and comprehensive Cancer Center. Other areas of expertise include a Concussion Center, Epilepsy Center, and Brain Tumor Center. The hospital offers state-of-the-art maternity and baby services, with private, customized care and a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit staffed with the largest pediatric surgery group in New Jersey. Overlook Hospital is accredited by The Joint Commission.

Atlantic Health is the primary academic and clinical affiliate in New Jersey of Mount Sinai School of Medicine and The Mount Sinai Hospital.

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