



# What You Need to Know as a Person With a Disability: Cervical and Breast Cancer Screenings

Research shows that people with disabilities are more likely to be diagnosed with cervical or breast cancer compared to people without disabilities, but they are less likely to be screened for these cancers (Iezzoni et al., 2021; CDC, 2022a). This does not mean that if you have a disability, you will develop cancer. However, you have a right to know that you may be at risk of developing cancer and have the right to cancer screenings done at the recommended times.

## How Can Providers Help? Applying Current Evidence and Best Practices

1. Women 50–74 years old with average risk should receive a mammogram for breast cancer every 2 years. Please begin speaking with your doctor at age 40 to identify your risk level (CDC, 2022b).
2. Women 21–65 years old should have a Papanicolaou (commonly called a pap smear) test to identify cervical cancer and other problems every 3 years (AAFD, n.d.).
3. People with disabilities are often diagnosed with cervical or breast cancer at a later age than people without disabilities (Iezzoni et al., 2021).
4. Your doctor may not know that they can make accommodations for cancer screenings when they are needed.
5. Your doctor may assume that you are not sexually active because you have a disability and that you do not need a cervical cancer exam.
6. You may also benefit from a human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccine to reduce the risk of cervical cancer. Ask your doctor if you qualify.



Breast cancer screening	Cervical cancer screening
<p>When preparing for breast cancer screening, the CDC (2020) recommends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wearing clothing that opens from the front, such as a button-up shirt.</li> <li>• If you wear a bra, wearing one that is easily removed.</li> <li>• Not using deodorant.</li> </ul> <p>For more information about breast cancer screenings, visit the CDC’s web page: <a href="https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/breast-cancer-screening.html">https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/breast-cancer-screening.html</a></p>	<p>When preparing for cervical cancer screening, the CDC (2022c) recommends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scheduling the screening for a time when you are not having your period.</li> <li>• Not doing the following for 2 days before the screening:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Using a tampon.</li> <li>○ Having sex.</li> <li>○ Using any types of creams or gels in your vagina.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>For more information about cervical cancer screenings, visit the CDC’s web page: <a href="https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/basic_info/screening.htm">https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/basic_info/screening.htm</a></p>

## Your Rights as a Patient With a Disability

As a patient with a disability, you have the right to:

- Have cancer screenings done when they should be done.
- Be treated with respect and dignity.
- Request changes to healthcare policies, practices, and procedures to make sure you have equal access to cancer screenings. This right is part of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA National Network, 2020). Examples of requests to help ensure equal access to cancer screenings include:
  - Screening in a specific room that gives you the space you need.
  - Scheduling a room with an adjustable bed.
  - Helping with reviewing paperwork.
  - Providing step-by-step explanation of the screening in plain language.
  - Allowing extra time for an appointment so you have enough time to prepare for the screening.



### References

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