

breast cancer

— AWARENESS — The Anniston Star — 2025



- 1 in 8 women, or approximately 13% of the female population in the U.S., will develop breast cancer in their lifetime.
- In 2024, an estimated 2,800 men will be diagnosed with invasive breast cancer in the United States.
- Breast cancer is the most common cancer in American women, except for skin cancers.
- It is estimated that in 2024, approximately 30% of all new female cancer diagnoses will be breast cancer.
- On average, every 2 minutes a woman is diagnosed with breast cancer in the United States.
- Approximately 66% of breast cancer cases are diagnosed at a localized stage, before cancer has spread outside of the breast, when it is easiest to treat.
- The 5-year relative survival rate for cancer diagnosed at the localized stage is 99%.
- Approximately 15% of women diagnosed have a family history of breast cancer. Those with a firstdegree relative (mother, sister, daughter) with breast cancer are nearly twice as likely to develop breast cancer themselves.
- In 2024, an estimated 310,720 new cases of invasive breast cancer will be diagnosed in women in the U.S., as well as 56,500 new cases of non-invasive (in situ) breast cancer.
- There are currently over 4 million breast cancer survivors in the United States.
- An estimated 42,250 U.S. women will die from breast cancer in 2024.
- Risk of breast cancer recurrence depends on the type and staging of the initial breast cancer. Typically, the highest risk of recurrence is during the first few years after treatment and decreases over time.

SOURCE: National Breast Cancer Foundation

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PHOTO BY SHERRY KUGHN, THE ANNISTON STAR

From left are Melissa Lawson, a data entry clerk at the Calhoun County tag office; Barry Robertson, the commissioner of licenses; and Miranda Bryant, the deputy chief clerk.

With strength and a smile, Anniston clerk overcomes cancer

By SHERRY KUGHN
Star Staff Writer

ANNISTON – Melissa Lawson knew something wasn't right one night in early 2024 when she felt a lump in one of her breasts.

"I felt alone. I was wide awake, and I just knew this didn't feel right," she said.

Lawson, 44, a data entry clerk at the Calhoun County vehicle tag office, didn't wait for her yearly checkup. She called her doctor and scheduled an appointment. After a mammogram, doctors told her the lump needed to be removed, but they weren't sure if it was cancer.

Further tests confirmed the cancer diagnosis, and her oncologist prescribed chemotherapy before surgery. That's when Lawson's toughest fight began. Eventually, she also had to have chemo after surgery.

"I started going to the doctor every three weeks for chemo," she said. "Those were the worst weeks of my life. I couldn't eat because everything came back up. I couldn't taste my food, I lost 20 pounds, and my skin started peeling. My hair started falling out after my second chemo."

Despite exhaustion and pain, Lawson kept showing up for work at the tag office.

"I came to work every day," she said. "Some days I was so sick I had to go home, but I tried."

Her strength didn't go unnoticed.

Barry Robertson, Calhoun County's commissioner of licenses, said Lawson inspired everyone in the office.

"I've never seen anybody with so much charisma and such a great attitude while dealing with what she's had to face," Robertson said. "She came to work every day with a smile and a laugh. She lifts us up when



COURTESY PHOTO

Melissa Lawson is more appreciative of life than ever.

she's the one going through the trauma. We need 20 more of her."

In October 2024, Lawson underwent surgery and was out of work for about six weeks. But doctors discovered not all the cancer was removed. She continued treatment with a different type of chemo, one that was easier on her body and allowed her hair to grow back, though not without a few surprises.

"As my hair came back in, it went through all kinds of changes," she said. "It was curly and thick. Now I look like I have an afro."

Finally, on Aug. 21, Lawson reached the milestone every cancer patient hopes for: she rang the bell to mark the end of treatment. Her daughter, Mya, 17, stood by her side, along with her cousin Nica Gatewood and a friend Chris Goodman, who supported her throughout the journey.

"I'm thankful for my daughter who helped me through it all," Lawson said. "She brought me

food, washed dishes, cleaned the house and made sure I took my medicine."

Lawson's co-workers also rallied around her. Deputy Chief Clerk Miranda Bryant said Lawson's perseverance left a deep impression.

"Melissa is a warrior. She is a fighter" Bryant said. "She fought every single day and never let it take her down. Seeing her bounce back, get her appetite and personality back has been amazing."

Now, Lawson is grateful for life's small pleasures, especially food.

"I love food so much," she said. "When my taste came back, I said, 'I want a steak, I want Mata's pizza.' The only thing I still can't taste is sodas. They just taste like water."

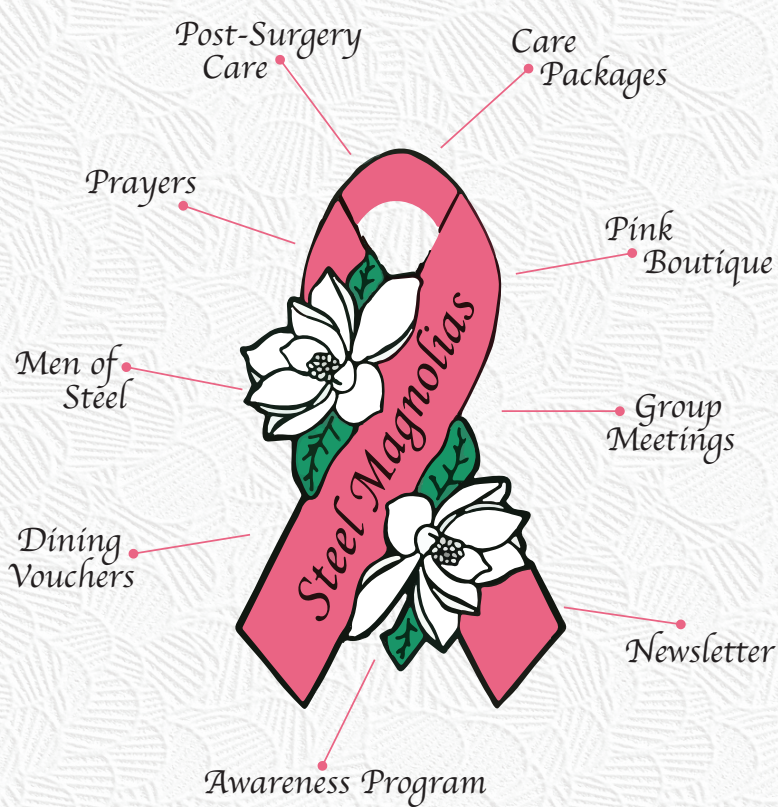
Bryant said Lawson's courage has changed how she sees life.

"It's been inspiring," she said. "When I look at Melissa, I think I don't have near the problems she does. She's taught me to take life more in stride."

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The latest breast cancer screening recommendations

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Health care screenings save untold numbers of lives each year. Screenings can uncover potentially life-threatening issues in their infancy. Such is often the case with cancer screenings, which are recommended to adults from all walks of life in an effort to detect the presence of the disease in its earliest, most treatable stages.

Screening can detect various forms of cancer, including breast cancer. Breast cancer screening guidelines are fluid as researchers and other health care professionals learn more about the disease. The following guidelines reflect recommendations from the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) in 2024.

- Women are now advised to start regular mammograms at age 40. Prior to these updated USPSTF recommendations, women

had been advised to start regular mammograms at age 50. But the Breast Cancer Research Foundation notes these new USPSTF guidelines now align with recommendations from other organizations.

- Screening mammograms should be scheduled every other year between the ages of 40 and 74. This timeline does not align with other organizations, many of which urge women to get annual mammograms. Women can discuss mammogram frequency with their physicians.

- The USPSTF cited a need for more research into the benefits of breast ultrasound and MRI for women with dense breasts. Women identified as having dense breasts can open a dialogue with their physicians about breast cancer screenings and request updates on the latest opinions surrounding breast ultrasounds and MRIs.

- The USPSTF acknowledged



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The United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) approved new screening guidelines in 2024.

it was unable to make specific recommendations regarding breast cancer screenings for women 75 and older, citing a lack of sufficient studies on which to base recommendations to women in this age group.

It's important to note that USPSTF recommendations are fluid and can change. Women are urged to take USPSTF recommendations and

advice from other organizations into consideration and work in concert with their health care team to identify the best screening strategy for them. More information about breast cancer screening is available at bcrf.org and uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org.

The different types of mammograms

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Mammograms remain the most effective method for diagnosing breast cancer and catching the disease in its earliest, most treatable stages. While various health organizations recommend different screening intervals, the American Cancer Society advises annual mammograms for women ages 40 to 54. Women age 55 and older who adhere to ACS recommendations can switch to a mammogram every two years if in good health.

Mammograms employ low-dose X-rays to map out breasts and detect

unusual growths. There are two main types of mammogram: screening and diagnostic.

SCREENING MAMMOGRAM

The Breast Cancer Research Foundation says a screening mammogram detects changes in breast tissue that could be indicative of breast cancer in women who exhibit no other symptoms of the disease. Mammograms sometimes can detect breast cancer up to three years before a person or doctors feel a lump. During the test, the breasts are flattened between two imaging plates from a few angles to get the X-rays.

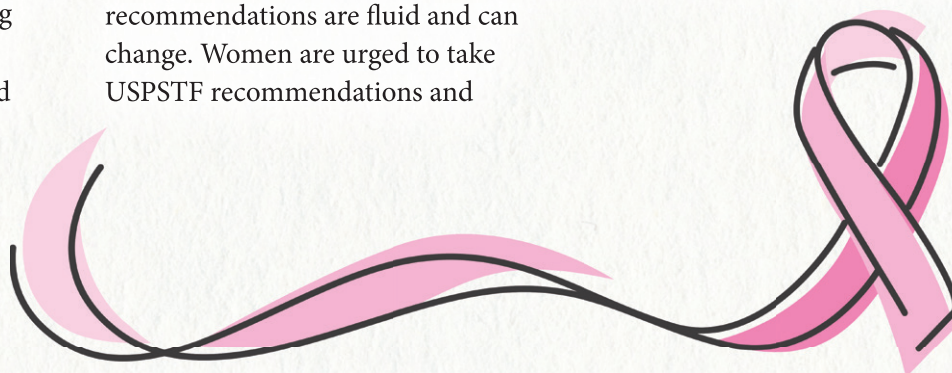
DIAGNOSTIC MAMMOGRAM

Should a screening mammogram show something amiss or not easily visible the first time around, radiologists may ask the person to come back for additional image testing. This diagnostic mammogram includes additional views. The National Breast Cancer Foundation says diagnostic mammograms take detailed X-rays of the breast using specialized techniques. They also may involve additional views or adjunct testing like ultrasound or MRI to provide a better overall picture of breast health. Diagnostic

mammograms may be used to zero in on a specific area of the breast that needs further clarification.

Because a diagnostic mammogram requires taking a greater number of images, it will expose a patient to a higher dose of radiation. Still, health professionals feel the risk is worth it to help rule out cancer. Also, unlike a screening mammogram that may take several days for a radiologist to read and identify results, a diagnostic mammogram can reveal important information immediately.

Screening and diagnostic mammograms are important tools used to check for breast cancer.



Breast Cancer Support Group

Steel Magnolias is dedicated to providing **SUPPORT** and **HOPE** to women whose lives have been affected by breast cancer.

*Pink ribbons on my clothing.
Scars across my chest.
Courage in my heart and
Steel in every step.*

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Ways You Can Help

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We would love for you to attend our meetings and get involved with us. You may also volunteer your time for office work or our PINKS Boutique, or help with our annual fundraiser the Lea Fite Memorial Golf Tournament in the spring.

CONTRIBUTE

Steel Magnolias is a 501 (c)(3) tax-exempt organization, contributions are tax-deductible and can be made to Steel Magnolias, P.O. Box 2208, Anniston, AL 36202

ALL contributions are used to provide services to breast cancer patients who reach out to us.

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Steel Magnolias meet on the 4th Tuesday of each Month (except Nov. & Dec.) at 5:00 p.m. on the 1st floor Private Dining room at RMC.

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DINING VOUCHERS

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SNACKS

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Hormone therapy

for breast cancer treatment

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A breast cancer diagnosis is unwelcome news, but thanks to the tireless efforts of researchers and support organizations, the overall five-year survival rate for breast cancer is now around 90 percent. That means 90 out of 100 people with breast cancer are still alive five years after diagnosis, according to the American Cancer Society.

Cancer stage at diagnosis and the patient's overall health play important roles in beating the disease, as does the type of treatment available. There are many different types of breast cancer treatments, and hormone therapy may be recommended.

The Cleveland Clinic advises that hormone therapy can be used to treat hormone receptor-positive (HR+) breast cancer, including the most common type of breast cancer: estrogen receptor-positive (ER+) breast cancer. Estrogen is one of the two hormones (along with progesterone) that is produced in the ovaries for much of a woman's life. After menopause, estrogen levels drop and estrogen is made in body fat and muscle, notes the organization Cancer Research UK. Estrogen and progesterone may stimulate the growth of some breast cancer cells.

Hormone receptor status in breast cancer is determined by testing the tumor tissue during a biopsy or surgery for the presence of estrogen and progesterone

receptors. The technique is known as immunohistochemistry. Penn Medicine reports that if at least 1 percent of the tested cells show these receptors, the cancer is hormone-positive. If the cancer is sensitive to progesterone, it is known as PR+. HR+ and PR+ should not be mistaken for Human Epidermal Growth Factor Receptor 2 (HER2) cancers, as HER2 cancers involve a protein that regulates cell growth rather than hormones influencing the cancer cells.

Hormone therapy may be used for certain reasons, according to the Mayo Clinic. It can reduce the size of a cancer prior to surgery. It also may slow or stop the growth of cancer that has spread (metastatic cancer). Hormone therapy also may decrease the risk of cancer developing in other breast tissue. Sometimes doctors use hormone therapy after surgery to reduce the risk of recurrence.

Hormone therapy for breast cancer may include aromatase inhibitors, selective estrogen receptor modulators or estrogen receptor down regulators. Side effects from these therapies can include fatigue, mood swings, nausea and vomiting, tender or swollen breasts, loss of interest in sex, hot flashes, and joint and muscle pain or stiffness, according to the Cleveland Clinic. Together patients and doctors can go over the risk and benefits of hormone therapy to discuss what is right for the cancer and the prognosis after treatment.



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Hormone therapy can be used to treat hormone receptor-positive (HR+) breast cancer.

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BE OUR GUEST

Steel Magnolias Breast Cancer Support Group

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71 percent of new cases of breast cancer across the globe were diagnosed in individuals age 50 and older.

Did you know:

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A 2024 report from the International Agency for Research on Cancer indicated 71 percent of new cases of breast cancer across the globe were diagnosed in individuals age 50 and older. Though age is a known risk factor for various types of cancer, it's important that women recognize a significant percentage of breast cancer diagnoses in many parts of the world are made in women younger than 50. For example, nearly one in five of breast cancer diagnoses in both North America (18 percent) and Europe (19

percent) are made in women younger than 50, while almost half of all breast cancers in Africa (47 percent) are diagnosed in women who have not yet reached their fiftieth birthdays. Though such figures are affected by a number of variables, including the accessibility of screening procedures like mammograms, they speak to the reality that breast cancer can affect women at any age, a notion that underscores the significance of screening and the need to support efforts to make it more accessible in every corner of the globe.

Every Plate Drives Change Drive for a Cure Every Woman Counts

By purchasing a 'Breast Cancer' license plate, you are showing support for survivors, honoring a loved one and helping fund awareness and research programs



"I am a Survivor"
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Barry Robertson
Commissioner of Licenses
Calhoun County, AL
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