

Staying healthy at any age

Know what screenings you should get and when

By Joanne Bratton
Photos By Kevin Pieper

Chris Garrison didn't have a family history of breast cancer. When she was 39, she decided to get a mammogram simply because she was getting ready to turn 40 and her insurance paid for it. She was expecting a routine examination that day in June 2003, but instead was diagnosed with breast cancer.

"You don't forget the day you were diagnosed with the big C-word," said Garrison, 49, of Mountain Home.

Garrison was diagnosed with ductal carcinoma in situ and had a lumpectomy. While under the care of a cancer specialist, she began radiation and chemotherapy treatments.

In January 2004, at a six-month mammogram appointment, doctors discovered breast cancer again, in a different spot. Garrison opted for a mastectomy, and since then, her tests have remained clear.

"After you are dealt with the big C-word, your perspective of life changes," Garrison said. "My time with my family and friends is more valuable to me. ... My house,



Chris Garrison of Mountain Home was diagnosed with breast cancer when she was 39 years old. She now helps facilitate a support group at Peitz Cancer Support House.



Preventative screenings are recommended for many people, but you should always talk to your doctor about what is best for you. GETTY IMAGES

the socks on the floor, can wait, if I can spend time with my family and friends. Life's too short."

She speaks candidly — and humorously — of her frustrations of wearing a prosthesis, and of her gratefulness for breast reconstruction surgery by Dr. Adam Newman in Mountain Home.

Garrison says she could not have gotten through without her faith, family and Baxter Regional Medical Center's Peitz Cancer Support

House. In fact, she helped start and now facilitates the evening breast cancer support group, which meets 6 p.m. the second and fourth Thursday of each month.

Individual risk

Screenings are important for everyone, not just those with a family history of cancer.

In fact, 80 percent of those who get breast cancer do not have a family history, said

Bonnie Fischer, coordinator of the Baxter Regional Medical Center's Mobile Mammography Unit.

"One in 8 women get it whether it is in their family or not," Fischer said. "A lot of women think if it's not in their family, they don't need to worry about it."

"You need to get your mammograms and do self-breast exams," Garrison said emphatically. "If you feel something, talk to your doctor about it."