

# Sister 2 Sister

“A Feminine touch of Progress”

NPMHU Local 300 Women’s Caucus

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## Decades of Silence

Actress Julia Louis-Dreyfus also known for her roles in *Steinfeld* & *Veep* announced she has breast cancer in a post on her Twitter account. “1 in 8 women get breast cancer. Today, I’m the one” she wrote. Louis-Dreyfus received her diagnosis the day after her historic Emmy win.

Julia Louis-Dreyfus

1 in 8 women get breast cancer. Today, I'm the one.

The good news is that I have the most glorious group of supportive and caring family and friends, and fantastic insurance through my union. The bad news is that not all women are so lucky, so let's fight all cancers and make universal health care a reality.



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But there was a time not so long ago that such a public admission and the swift praise of her bravery were not a given. In the '80s women with breast cancer faced debilitating stigmas in accessing treatment, in receiving sensitive care from their surgeons, and in being seen as whole women if their breasts were removed.

Cultural shifts in the last century, including feminism and social media, have transformed the fight against breast cancer from an individual struggle into a collective cause. We look at some of the big moments that took breast cancer out of the dark and into the pink. It starts with an ordinary woman (1952), Terese Lasser, the very first true activist who bumped against the system. What she took issue with was not the procedure but what she saw as her surgeon's indifference. She had questions about sex, about what to tell her kids which made her one of the first activists who was brave enough to question the doctors. Lasser formed the Reach to Recovery program to help women cope with breast cancer. It's now part of the American Cancer Society.



In 1974, former first lady Betty Ford told the country she had breast cancer. Public figures then didn't talk openly about the disease, but Ford made it a part of the national conversation. In 1982, Nancy Brinker founded Susan G. Komen in honor of her sister Suzy, who died of breast cancer at 36. Its inception marked the very first time that there had ever been targeted funds raised for breast cancer research. The organization says it has funded more than \$920 million in cancer research.

On August 15, 1993, *The New York Times Magazine* featured an image of a woman with a mastectomy-scarred chest. The headline read, “You Can't Look Away Anymore.” Susan Ferraro's story on the politics of breast cancer proved the issue had gone mainstream.

The Internet created a robust community for women with breast cancer that not only provided support, but access to information. A 2008 study in the *Journal of Public Health* found women with breast cancer use the Internet to help facilitate conversations with their doctors.

Susan G. Komen says it has used the color pink since its inception. In 1991, the organization distributed pink ribbons to 2,500 participants of the Komen Greater New York City Race for the Cure. The next year *Self* magazine created a pink ribbon to honor its second annual Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and sold it at stores across NYC. Now each October the ribbons — and the color — are seen on everyone from NFL players to airline attendants.

## Men and Breast Cancer

A breast cancer is a malignant tumor that starts from cells of the breast. This tumor is a group of cancer cells that may grow into (invade) surrounding tissues or spread to distant areas of the body. Cells in nearly any part of the body can become cancer, and can spread to other areas of the body.

Breast cancer occurs mainly in women, but men can get it too. Many people do not realize that men have breast tissue and that they can develop breast cancer. Here is some basic knowledge about the normal structure of the breasts: The breast is made up mainly of lobules (glands that can produce milk if the right hormones are present), ducts (tiny tubes that carry the milk from the lobules to the nipple), and stroma (fatty tissue surrounding the ducts and lobules). Until puberty, young boys and girls have a small amount of breast tissue consisting of a few ducts located under the nipple and areola. At puberty, a girl's ovaries make female hormones, causing breast ducts to grow, lobules to form at the ends of ducts, and the amount of stroma to increase. Even after puberty, men and boys normally have low levels of female hormones, and breast tissue doesn't grow much. Men's breast tissue has ducts, but only a few if any lobules.

Like all cells of the body, a man's breast duct cells can undergo cancerous changes. But breast cancer is less common in men because their breast duct cells are less developed than a woman's and because they normally have lower levels of female hormones that affect the growth of breast cells.

It is rare for a man under age 35 to get breast cancer. The chance of a man getting breast cancer goes up with age. Most breast cancers happen to men between ages 60 and 70. Other risk factors of male breast cancer include:

- Breast cancer in a close female relative
- History of radiation exposure of the chest
- Enlargement of breasts (called gynecomastia) from drug or hormone treatments, or even some infections and poisons
- Taking estrogen
- A rare genetic condition called Klinefelter's syndrome
- Severe liver disease (called cirrhosis)
- Diseases of the testicles such as mumps orchitis, a testicular injury, or an undescended testicle

The major problem is that breast cancer in men is often diagnosed later than breast cancer in women. This may be because men are less likely to be suspicious of something strange in that area. Also, their small amount of breast tissue is harder to feel, making it harder to catch these

cancers early. It also means tumors can spread more quickly to surrounding tissues.

Symptoms of breast cancer in men are similar to those in women. Most male breast cancers are diagnosed when a man discovers a lump on his chest. But unlike women, men tend to delay going to the doctor until they have more severe symptoms, like bleeding from the nipple. At that point the cancer may have already spread.

## Where to get a free or low-cost mammogram

Yes, you should be able to receive free mammograms screening under the Affordable Care Act if you covered by insurance. But if you're uninsured here is a list of resources for free and low-cost mammograms.

**Planned Parenthood** does thousands of mammograms every year.

**Avon Foundation Breast Imaging Center** located at New York Presbyterian-Columbia.

**The S.A.V.E. program at UMDNJ Newark**, in New Jersey, provides mammography, pap smear, colorectal cancer screenings and health services education.

**Susan G. Komen for the Cure** funds local initiatives, go to their website to find local partner listings.

**The Breast Center at Nyack Hospital** provides breast health education, screening and diagnostic treatment and support services to medically underserved women.

**Callen-Lorde Community Health Center** offers targeted education and screening coordination for underserved and at-risk lesbian/bisexual women and individuals of transgender and gender non-conforming experience.

**Long Island Jewish Medical Center** provides psychosocial and financial support to medically under served African-American, Hispanic, Asian, uninsured and undocumented women in Southeast Queens and Jamaica (Queens)

**The New York Hospital Medical Center of Queens** provides assistance in scheduling appointments, translation/interpretation services, transportation, insurance enrollment assistance support group referrals  
**Open Door Family Medical Center** delivers culturally and linguistically appropriate education, screening and diagnostic services, as well as treatment, for low-income, immigrant women attending Open Doors clinics (Westchester County)

**St. John's Riverside Hospital** provides education, outreach and screening services targeted to uninsured and undocumented Latina and African-American women in Yonkers (Westchester County)

**Mount Sinai School of Medicine** provides culturally and linguistically appropriate navigational assistance to African-American and Latina women in need of a clinical breast examination and/or mammography (Brooklyn, Bronx and Manhattan)