The Galleri test is a blood test and it picks up circulating tumor cells at earlier stages than they would be clinically evident. But the survival benefit of doing so has not yet been proven.

And there are certainly certain tumors that cannot be detected in this way. And there aren't too many cases in which the test is positive, but there are not in fact any tumors that are found.

But whether it is long-term helpful in your survivorship has yet to be determined. Have you made it past menopause, or are you going through it now? I'm Dr.

Pat McShane, and on the Women's Health Span Voices podcast, I'll guide you through the health challenges of the menoppausal years and beyond, guiding the way to thriving in this powerful era of your womanhood.

Hello and welcome. In this podcast, I'm going to be talking about a subject that most of us find pretty scary and very unpleasant, which is cancer. And yet, it's quite important to talk about it because it is the second leading cause of mortality in women behind cardiovascular disease and there are certainly lifestyle features that might help you to avoid getting cancer in the first instance and some detection strategies that may detect a cancer early when it is certainly much more treatable.

So let's dive in on this one. So there's some good news and some bad news. Let's start with the badness. Around 40% of women will experience invasive cancer during their lifetime.

And I found this statistic quite surprising and yet it seems to be the case. And the most common ones are breast cancer, which still, although seen quite often in premenopausal women, most breast cancers are seen in postmenapausals women.

Which again was a bit of a surprise to me as I was doing this research. The other common cancers in women are lung, colorectal cancer, uterine, and ovarian, those are in order of incidence.

Those are not the ones that are the most fatal though, that's because the treatment of some of the tumors is getting a lot better over time. The tumors that cause the more mortality in women include lung, breast, especially in Black and Hispanic women, pancreatic colorectal and ovarian.

Not sure why we need to know that today, but those are the data. The good news is that the incidence of cancer is declining in both men and women And it has been for a bit of a time now.

One aspect is that women and men, for that matter, have stopped smoking at the same incidents as they had been decades ago. So that has diminished the risk of lung cancer.

And the treatments for lot of cancers have improved, which is certainly very good news. However, the obesity-related cancers are increasing, so it's a back and forth here.

The other good news in this field pertains to mostly younger women, and that is the incidence of cervical cancer has declined dramatically since the initiation of vaccination for girls in their early reproductive age range to prevent the HPV infections that are known to cause cervical So in some reports, the incidence of death from cervical cancer in young women has basically gone to zero, which is certainly fantastic news.

It is estimated in the public health literature that around 40% of cancer is preventable. And I'm going to basically run down a list here of cancers and the lifestyle things that might be preventive of those.

And most of this is pretty commonsensical, but one or two things may be a little bit of a surprise for you. Lung cancer of course is related to smoking and bladder cancer as well.

Obesity is known to increase the risk of breast cancer, endometrial cancer which is uterine cancer and bowel cancer. Alcohol increases the risks of cancer in colorectal and liver cancer Breast cancer is increased with even a small amount of alcohol on a daily basis.

There's a fair amount dietary information here, which is that red and processed meats may be associated with colorectal cancer and ultra-processed food also with Colorechtal Cancer.

Meanwhile, protective of various cancers are fibrous foods, fruits and vegetables. Inactivity is associated with the risk of colon and breast cancer. And unopposed hormone replacement therapy is associate with a slight increase in breast and if a woman has a uterus and is not using progesterone, her risk endometrial cancer is increased if she is taking hormone-replacement therapy.

Other risk factors that are not preventable in a lifestyle fashion include genetics, and there are certainly a lot of people who have an increased risk of breast and ovarian cancer from the BRCA1 and 2 genes, which probably most of you all are familiar with.

and environmental issues as well, passive smoking being one of them and poor air quality being another. And then viral infections, which I think is an area that we're just starting to appreciate more.

I have read some things about vaccination besides being preventative for cervical cancer, it may be preventive for dementia and certain other cancers in older individuals.

So let's move over and talk about screening. Most of us are quite familiar with the mammograms that we have been dutifully participating in for many years.

And the recommendation is to continue mammography until age 75 for most women. Again, most of us have been quite familiar with the testing for colon cancer, which has included colonoscopy and tests of our stool, of mailing our feces samples back to a laboratory for analysis.

And again, for most people, this will be continued to age 75 on an annual basis, rarely up to age 85 if someone has very few other medical conditions and is expected to have a long life expectancy.

We should continue having our pap smears until age 65 for almost everyone. And many of us should be having low dose computed tomography for lung cancer risk.

This includes people who have a 20-pack year history of smoking. That is, smoking a pack a day for one year equals one pack year. And if you have quit within the last 15 years, then you're no longer eligible unless you've chronic lung disease or some other kind of risk factor.

Those who live in a particularly smoky environment, such as indoor cooking, may also have a good option to have low dose computed tomography of their lungs.

And this has been shown to increase the survivorship for lung cancer because the lung-cancer dots or lesions are typically much smaller than they would be if one waited until there were symptoms.

We may have been reading about the gallery test and the computed tomography of our whole body, or MRI rather, to detect early cancers before they become clinically apparent.

And the problem with both of these tests is similar, but I'll go through each one of them a little bit one at a time, which is that the Galleri test is a blood test and it picks up circulating tumor cells at earlier stages than they would be clinically evident.

But the survival benefit of doing so has not yet been proven. And there are certainly certain tumors that cannot be detected in this way. And there aren't too many cases in which the test is positive, but there are not in fact any tumors that are found.

But whether it is long-term helpful in your survivorship has yet to be determined. I think that will take probably another decade to really manifest since many tumors start certainly years and in some cases decades before they become clinically important.

And with respect to the total body imaging, the main issue there is what we call false positives, which is something is seen on the imaging but it turns out that it's not anything significant.

But in the meantime, that person who has had the screening test has gone through surgery and other testing that may invasive or even dangerous, and certainly the anxiety and worry and expense of doing so is a real concern for these total body imaging tests for cancer.

a little bit of a sidebar here which is bariatric surgery, which some of my listeners may be considering. And there does seem to be an impact on the risk of obesity-related cancers by having the bariatric surgery.

The mechanism there is probably total body inflammation and immune system dysregulation that occurs with obesity. So someone who loses a substantial amount of their fat cells, fat mass in their body, has been shown to have a lower risk of some of the obesity-related cancers.

So certainly if this is a concern in your family, for example, or if you have some high-risk situation like a finding on a colonoscopy that's precancerous, that might be a consideration for you.

Just something to throw into the mix as you're making that decision. And I want to spend our final minutes here talking about skin cancer. And what I'm talking is not melanoma, which is a very dangerous, invasive, life-threatening illness, but the more common basal and squamous cell cancers that so many of us have mostly on exposed parts of our body from sun exposure over the years.

And what I would encourage you to do with respect to that, especially if you have sensitive skin and have a lot of moles and other precancerous lesions on your body that have been pointed out to you by your treating physicians, is to go through the skin self-exam exercise on a frequent basis.

And there's a couple of options for this. The American Cancer Society has a good site for these as well as the Skin Cancer Foundation. And this testing involves a full-body mirror and a handheld mirror.

and good lighting in a few minutes of time, but for many people is probably going to save them from having more invasive surgery at some point. And you may actually be dealing with a serious tumor like melanoma, most of the time we're just going be finding either basal cell or squamous cell cancers.

So I hope information on this scary topic hasn't been too depressing and sad for many of us since I'm hoping that we got some ideas about preventative measures and early detection that can help many us to have to go through the ordeal of cancer therapy.

So if this is the kind of information you value, please like and share it with a friend. And I hope to see you again soon. Thank you. Thanks for listening to the Women's Health Span Voices podcast.

If today's episode spoke to you, follow the show and shared with the friend ready to take charge of her health and please leave a review. It helps more women find us.