For Breast Cancer Prevention Share Good Info, Not Hearts

By Ana-Marija Dolaskie — January 17, 2017

Recently a breast cancer awareness campaign has been popping up on women's Facebook messengers, including my own.
The idea behind it is that we ought to post a simple ‘heart’ as our status to 'secretly' show support for the continued battle against breast cancer. Hundreds — if not thousands — of women have done this in the past week or so, prompting follow-up questions about the message behind the images from Facebook friends.

Let me be clear: If this is your way of showing support for breast cancer, so be it. And while the idea is well-intentioned, we women are doing a great disservice to ourselves — and our lady lumps — by not taking the opportunity to relay a more stern message to other women about breast health. If you truly want to inform women about the importance of prevention and self-examination, start by sharing this image:
WorldWide Breast Cancer [1], an organization that educates and encourages women to take hold of their breast health, has put out this gem of a photo about the importance of seeing and feeling breast abnormalities. While a lump is the most common sign of breast cancer, the image — entitled Know Your Lemons — shows twelve different ways breast cancer can look and feel like, from retracted nipples, to growing veins and dimpling. Several other info-graphics [1] on the site explain the best time to check your breasts — few days after your period and regularly after menopause. Regular mammography screening can detect abnormalities long before a lump or other symptoms are felt or seen.

As we have written [2] in the past, mammograms aren't always reliable. For instance, dense breasts (which are common in 40 percent of women) can make it more difficult for doctors to detect breast abnormalities on a mammogram. What's worse, most women are unaware of just how dense their breasts may be, and that density itself is an independent risk for breast cancer. Breast density can also be widely subjective, causing more confusion in doctors and patients. An ultrasound or MRI are often used as a second tool for screening women with dense breasts.

So it is up to us, ladies. We ought to be the biggest advocates for breast health. Ask questions. Examine often. Feel often. But the way to healthy breasts is not through our Facebook hearts.