During the month of October, Employee Health and Wellbeing is devoted to spreading awareness about Breast Cancer, include routine breast exams and prevention methods. Exercise is an effective preventative tool for minimizing the risk of developing many diseases in adults. For women, exercise can also be a preventative method to decrease the chance of developing breast cancer. Some benefits associated with exercising to decrease the risk of breast cancer include maintaining a healthy weight, decreasing the levels of estrogen in your body, strengthening your immune system, and providing mental benefits and relief from stress.

Although some days it's hard to be motivated to stay active and exercise, instructors like Milinda Atallian will tell you to think of exercise as a gift instead of a chore, and you’re more likely to stick with it.

"I was 34 years old when I was diagnosed," said EHW instructor Milinda Atallian. "At the time, I was pregnant. I found the lump when I was lying in bed just scratching my chest. It felt to me like an eraser under my skin, one of those hard erasers. So, I called the doctor. They initially thought that it could have been glandular, since I was pregnant, and they got me in the next day. It turned out that it was not glandular. My initial thoughts were more concern for my family because I didn’t want them to worry. I really felt that I was going to be OK. I knew that I was strong enough to handle it but my concern was for my daughter, who was 2 at the time, and my family.

I did take a more radical approach than other people do, but it worked for me. I had stage 1 breast cancer, and the doctors recommended that I get a lumpectomy. But I wanted it to be gone and have nowhere to come back. So, I chose to have a bilateral mastectomy, and thankfully I did, because they found another lump that they would not have taken out had I gotten the lumpectomy."
I think that being physically fit going into any type of illness, whether it be cancer or something else, is huge. It’s a lot about your attitude and mindset. I knew I was strong enough going into it and I knew that I would be strong enough coming out of it. But there were days that sucked going through it and there still are days that suck. I have lymphedema so I wear a sleeve. My skin is different, my hair is different, my nails are different. My body is not the same from taking the medicine. So, there are days that still suck. I really just try to breathe in and out and let it go because time is just too precious. That is something that It will teach you - that time is too precious to waste on worrying.

I have always worked out. I have played sports since I was a little girl. And I have always been into fitness. I teach Les Mills classes - so I teach BodyFlow, BodyPump, Sprint. At University of Delaware, I teach Bodyweight Bootcamp. When I started working in fitness, it was a year after I was diagnosed with breast cancer. It was important to me to give back and show people that they can work out before, during and after.

I got my tattoo a year after I was diagnosed. I put it on my left ankle because the cancer was on my left side and I put it on the back of my ankle because so that I could remember it but have it be behind me.

I have been cancer-free for 11 years this past summer. I feel so blessed that I am here and caught it early because not everybody does. Early detection is just so important, so I always encourage people to check their bodies from head to toe. I used to just get the pink stripe in my hair during October but then people commented so much that I keep it year-round. I got it so that people could ask me about it and then I could tell them to check their body. I sport pink all year."

For women who have gone through breast cancer treatment just like Milinda, physical exercise has several advantages, from minimizing fatigue to improving long-term health. It is important that women continue to stay active post treatment to lower the risk of breast cancer coming back, as well as easing treatment side effects, boosting energy and more!

For more information on the facts and figures of breast cancer, please review the American Cancer's Society's findings from 19-20.