

What can I do to lower my risk of breast cancer?

The causes of breast cancer are not fully known. It is clear that age, gender and lifetime exposure to estrogen play a role. Other factors may also increase your risk. No one knows exactly why someone gets breast cancer. But there are things you can do that may reduce your risk. These include:

- Maintain a healthy weight
- Add exercise into your routine
- Limit alcohol intake
- Limit menopausal hormone use
- Breastfeed, if you can

For women at higher risk, preventive surgery or taking a risk-lowering drug (tamoxifen or raloxifene) may greatly reduce the risk of breast cancer.

What do you need to know?

Anyone can get breast cancer. For example, did you know...

- The older a woman, the more likely she is to get breast cancer?
- White women are more likely to get breast cancer than women of any other racial or ethnic group?
- Men can get breast cancer?
- While rare, young women can also get breast cancer?



Am I at risk for breast cancer?

Everyone is at risk. Most women who get breast cancer have no other risk factors aside from being a woman.

I have a family history of breast cancer. Does that mean I'll get breast cancer, too?

No, it does not mean that you will develop breast cancer too. In fact, most women in the U.S. who get breast cancer do not have a family history of the disease. But, family history may put you at higher risk. Some breast cancers are linked to an inherited gene mutation. These mutations are rare in the general public. In the U.S., only about five to 10 percent of breast cancers are due to an inherited gene mutation. Talk to your doctor about your risk of cancer. He/she can help you understand more about your risk.

If I am diagnosed with breast cancer, what are my chances of surviving?

The chances of survival are good. Survival rates are averages and vary depending on each person's diagnosis and treatment. Your chances of survival are better if the cancer is found early, before it spreads to other parts of your body. Most people with early breast cancer will live a long life and the cancer will never return.

How do you find breast cancer?

The best way to find breast cancer early is to get screened. Screening tests can find breast cancer early, when the chances of survival are highest. Regular screening tests (along with treatment if diagnosed) lower the risk of dying from breast cancer. Talk with a doctor about which screening tests are right for you.

A **mammogram** is an X-ray image of the breast. It is the best screening tool used today to find breast cancer early. A mammogram can find cancer before a lump can be felt.

A **clinical breast exam** is done by a doctor or nurse who checks your breasts and underarm areas for any lumps or changes. Many women have a clinical breast exam when they get their annual check-up.

Know what is normal for you

The signs of breast cancer are not the same for all women. It is important to know how your breasts normally look and feel. If you notice any change, see your health care provider.

Are you at risk?

Most women have more than one known risk factor for breast cancer, yet will never get the disease. Some risk factors you cannot control, such as getting older, while others can be changed. But remember, there is no *one* cause of breast cancer. If you are concerned about your risk, talk with a doctor.

Some risk factors that increase risk include (in alphabetical order):

- Age (older)
- Age at first childbirth (older)
- Age at first period (younger)
- Age at menopause (older)
- Alcohol use
- Ashkenazi Jewish heritage
- Being a woman
- Birth control pill use (current or recent)
- *BRCA1* or *BRCA2* inherited gene mutation
- Breast density on a mammogram (high)
- Family history of breast, ovarian or prostate cancer
- Height (taller)
- Hyperplasia or lobular carcinoma in situ (LCIS)
- Light at night/night shift work (for many years)
- Menopausal hormone therapy (postmenopausal hormoneuse) containing estrogen plus progestin (current or recentuse for more than five years)
- Not breastfeeding
- Not exercising
- Overweight or obese after menopause
- Personal history of breast cancer, including ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS)
- Radiation treatment at a young age

For more information about these and other risk factors, visit www.komen.org/risk.

Related fact sheets in this series:

- Breast Cancer in Men
- Breast Cancer Risk Factors
- Breast Density
- Healthy Living
- Racial & Ethnic Differences