



There is no sure way to prevent breast cancer, but there are things you can do that might help lower your chances of getting it.

Breast Cancer Risk Factors

A risk factor is anything that increases your chances of getting a disease, such as breast cancer. But having a risk factor, or even many, does not mean that you will get the disease. And some people who get the disease may not have any known risk factors. It is important to talk to your health care provider about these risk factors and about breast cancer screening.

While men can get breast cancer, too, the information here is about breast cancer risk factors in people who were born female.

Breast Cancer Risk Factors You Can Change

Some breast cancer risk factors are related to lifestyle and personal behaviors. There are some things you can do that may lower your risk:

- **Avoid alcohol** – Drinking alcohol has been linked to an increase in risk for breast cancer. Women who do drink should have no more than 1 drink a day.
- **Get to and stay at a healthy weight** – Having excess weight before and after menopause may have different effects on certain types of breast cancer.

- **Move more** – Regular physical activity can help lower breast cancer risk, especially in women after menopause. The American Cancer Society recommends that adults get 150-300 minutes of moderate activity, like walking, mowing the lawn, or playing with children or pets, each week. Adults who are more active should try for at least 75-150 minutes of more intense activity, like jogging or jumping rope, each week. Or you could do some of each.

Breast Cancer Risk Factors You Cannot Change

Some risk factors cannot be changed.

Being born female

Breast cancer is much more common in women than men.

Getting older

As you get older, the risk of breast cancer goes up. Most breast cancers are found in women age 55 and older.

Personal or family history

- A woman with cancer in one breast has a higher risk of getting a new cancer in the other breast or in another part of the same breast.
- A woman has an increased risk for breast cancer when a close blood relative has had breast cancer (mother, father, sister, brother, daughter).

Inherited gene changes

Some breast cancers can develop because of gene changes (mutations) passed down from a parent. Mutations in the **BRCA** genes are the most common causes of inherited breast cancer in women. *BRCA* gene mutations also increase the risk of breast cancer in men, although the risk is much lower than in women. Other, less common gene mutations may also lead to inherited breast cancers. **Your health care provider can discuss the risks and benefits of genetic testing for these changes, and may refer you to a genetic counselor.**



Race and ethnicity

- Overall, white women are slightly more likely to get breast cancer than African American women. But in women under age 40, breast cancer is more common in African American women.
- In the United States, *BRCA* mutations are more common in Jewish people of Ashkenazi (Eastern Europe) origin than in other racial and ethnic groups, but anyone can have these mutations.

Dense breast tissue or other breast conditions

- A mammogram can show if you have dense breasts. Women with dense breasts have a higher risk for breast cancer. Breast density can be affected by factors such as age, menopausal status, the use of certain drugs, pregnancy, and genetics.
- Some non-cancerous (benign) breast conditions may also increase a woman's risk for breast cancer. Your health care provider can discuss your risk related to these conditions.

Early menstruation (before age 12) or menopause after age 55

Having more menstrual cycles in her lifetime increases a woman's breast cancer risk. This is because of longer exposure to the hormones estrogen and progesterone throughout the menstrual years.

Other things that may affect risk:

- A woman who had radiation therapy to the chest because of another cancer when she was younger has a higher risk of breast cancer.
- A woman who took an estrogen-like drug called DES (diethylstilbestrol) during pregnancy (or if her mother took it) may have a slightly higher risk of breast cancer.

Breast Cancer Risk Tools

Some tools can help predict a woman's risk of getting breast cancer. They give a rough estimate of risk based on certain factors. However, there is no tool or test that can tell for sure if you'll develop breast cancer.

An example of this is the National Cancer Institute Breast Cancer Risk Assessment Tool. It can help estimate your risk of getting breast cancer in the next five years and over your lifetime. If the tool shows a certain level of risk for breast cancer, it may also help you and your health care provider decide if you need certain tests to look for breast cancer, or if you should consider medications to help lower your risk.

It's important to know that this tool, and others, may have limited accuracy.

Talk to your health care provider about your risk factors and breast cancer screening. For cancer information, day-to-day help, and support, visit the the American Cancer Society website at cancer.org/breastcancer or call us at **1-800-227-2345**.