

# Lowering Breast Cancer Risk

There is no sure way to prevent breast cancer. Many risk factors are beyond your control, including gender and aging. However, other risk factors can be changed and may lower your risk.

## For all women

You are more likely to get breast cancer if you:

- Are female. Men can have breast cancer, but it is rare.
- Are older. The risk for breast cancer increases with age.
- Have a family history of breast cancer.
- Had radiation therapy to the breast or chest area in the past.
- Had breast cancer previously.
- Had your first menstrual period before you were 11 years old.
- Went through menopause after age 55.
- Have never been pregnant or had your first child after age 35.
- Have dense breast tissue.
- Have used hormones for menopause for more than five years.
- Are overweight.
- Do not exercise regularly.
- Drink alcohol in any form.

There is no certain way to prevent breast cancer. There are things you can do to lower your chances of having breast cancer.

- **Keep a healthy weight:** Both increased body weight and weight gain as an adult are linked with a higher risk of breast cancer after menopause.
- **Eat a healthy diet:** Some studies suggest that a diet high in vegetables, fruits and calcium-rich dairy products, but low in red and processed meats might help lower the risk of breast cancer.
- **Avoid or limit alcohol:** Alcohol increases breast cancer risk. It is best not to drink alcohol at all. For women who do drink, they should have no more than one alcoholic drink a day. A drink is 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits.

- **Exercise:** Studies show that moderate to vigorous physical activity is linked with lower breast cancer risk. The American Cancer Society recommends that adults get at least 150 to 300 minutes of moderate activity (such as brisk walking) or 75 to 150 minutes of vigorous activity (such as jogging or running) each week (or a combination of these), preferably spread throughout the week.
- **Smoking cessation:** Do not smoke cigarettes. Smoking increases your risk of many types of cancer.
- **Breastfeeding:** Women who choose to breastfeed for at least several months after childbirth may also get an added benefit of reducing their breast cancer risk.
- **Other factors that might lower risk:** If you are on hormone replacement therapy, talk with your healthcare provider to discuss discontinuing the use of hormone replacement therapy.

## For women at increased risk of breast cancer

Some women are at an increased risk of breast cancer when you:

- Have a strong family history of breast cancer in first-degree relatives, which includes a mother, sister(s) and daughter(s).
- Have a known inherited gene mutation that increases breast cancer risk, such as BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes.
- Had DCIS or LCIS on a prior biopsy.

If you would like to discuss this information with our Breast Health Navigator, please contact Christine Mikkelsen, RN, at 510.818.7356.

There are some additional things to consider that might help lower your chances of developing breast cancer or help find it early.

- **Medicine to lower breast cancer risk:** A thorough discussion with your health care provider is essential.
- **Preventive breast surgery:** A thorough discussion with your health care provider is essential.
- **Genetic counseling and testing**
- **Close observation to look for early signs of breast cancer:** This approach does not lower breast cancer risk, but may help find cancer early when it is likely easier to treat.
  - More frequent doctor visits (every 6 to 12 months) for breast exams and ongoing risk assessment.
  - Start screening mammography at a younger age. Typically 10 years younger than the youngest firstdegree relative with breast cancer.
  - Possibly adding another screening test, such as breast MRI.

### What is breast density and why is it important?

Breast density reflects fibrous and glandular tissue of the breast relative to fat tissue. Breast density is not directly related to overall body fat and generally cannot be changed. Approximately 50% of women have dense breasts. The description of breast density is provided in every mammography report. Women who have dense breast tissue have a slightly higher risk of breast cancer compared to women with less dense breast tissue. This may be that dense breast tissue has more cells that can develop into abnormal cells.

Dense breast tissue can obscure small abnormalities; however, digital breast Tomosynthesis (3D mammography) has been shown to be helpful in interpreting dense breast tissue mammograms. If your mammogram report says you have dense breast tissue, talk with your health care provider about what this means for you.

### Where can I learn more?

#### National Cancer Institute

<http://www.cancer.gov/types/breast/patient/breastprevention-pdq>

#### American Cancer Society

<https://www.cancer.org/cancer/breast-cancer/risk-andprevention.html>

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### Talk to your doctor about:

- The best kind of breast cancer screening for you.
- Any change in the appearance or feel of your breasts.
- Any nipple discharge.
- Any questions or concerns you have about your breasts.



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