



## Breast Cancer Risk

There is no sure way to prevent breast cancer. But there are things you can do and talk to your healthcare provider about that might lower your chances of getting breast cancer. Getting regular screening tests is the best way to find breast cancer early.

### Breast Cancer Risk Factors You Can Change

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

- **Limit or avoid alcohol** – Drinking alcohol has been linked to an increase in risk for breast cancer. The [American Cancer Society recommends](#) no more than 1 alcoholic drink per day for women or 2 alcoholic drinks per day for men.
- **Stay active and keep a healthy weight** – Being active can help lower breast cancer risk. Being overweight or obese before and after menopause may have different effects on certain types of breast cancer. Regular exercise and good food choices are important. The American Cancer Society [recommends](#) that adults get at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity activity each week.

### Breast Cancer Risk Factors You Cannot Change

Some risk factors cannot be changed. For example, breast cancer is much more common in women than in men. And, as you get older, your risk of breast cancer goes up. Most breast cancers are found in women age 55 and older.

**Talk to your healthcare provider about these risk factors and about breast cancer screening.**

#### 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 happen because of a gene defect (mutation) passed down from a parent. Mutations in the **BRCA genes** are the most common causes of inherited breast cancer in women at a younger age (although they account for only a small number of breast cancers overall). Other, less common gene mutations may also lead to inherited breast cancers. **Your healthcare provider can discuss the pros and cons of [genetic testing](#) for these changes, and may refer you to a genetic counselor.**

## Breast Cancer Risk Factors You Cannot Change (continued)

### Race and ethnicity

- Overall, white women are slightly more likely to get breast cancer than African-American women. But in women under age 45, 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 help you and your healthcare provider to know if you have dense breasts. Women with dense breasts have an increased 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 healthcare 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 5 years and over your lifetime. If the tool shows a certain level of risk for breast cancer, it may also help you and your healthcare 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 healthcare provider  
about your risk factors and breast  
cancer screening.**



[cancer.org](https://cancer.org) | 1.800.227.2345



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When we walk together, we're one step closer to beating breast cancer.

[MakingStridesWalk.org](https://MakingStridesWalk.org)