FACTS FOR LIFE

Breast Cancer Risk Factors

What affects your risk of getting breast cancer?

The causes of breast cancer are not fully known. However, researchers have found factors that increase (or decrease) the chance of getting breast cancer. These are called risk factors.

Breast cancer is complex and likely caused by a combination of risk factors. Some factors you may be able to control (like exercise). Some are out of your control. For example, the two most common risk factors for breast cancer are being a woman and getting older. And, some are still unknown. Since you can only control some risk factors, you cannot avoid some amount of risk.

Most risk factors that you have some control over only have a small effect on risk. This means that no one behavior will prevent breast cancer. But, it also means there's no one factor that will cause it.

Talk with a doctor about your risk.

Some factors linked to a higher risk of breast cancer:

- A family history of breast, ovarian or prostate cancer
- A personal history of breast cancer, including ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS)
- Alcohol use
- Ashkenazi Jewish heritage
- An inherited *BRCA1* or *BRCA2* gene mutation
- Being a woman
- Being overweight (especially after menopause)
- Current or recent use of birth control pills
- Current or recent use (for more than 5 years) of menopausal hormone therapy (postmenopausal hormone use) containing estrogen plus progestin
- Exposure to large amounts of radiation at a young age
- Getting older
- High breast density on a mammogram
- Hyperplasia or lobular carcinoma in situ (LCIS)
- Lack of exercise
- Never having children or having a first child after age 35
- Not breastfeeding
- Older age at menopause
- Weight gain
- Younger age at first period

Make healthy lifestyle choices:

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

Age: a major factor

A woman's chance of getting breast cancer increases with age.

If your current age is:	The chances of developing breast cancer in the next 10 years is:
20	1 in 1,674
30	1 in 225
40	1 in 69
50	1 in 44
60	1 in 29
70	1 in 26
Lifetime risk (0 to age 85)	1 in 8

For more information, visit www.komen.org or call Susan G. Komen's breast care helpline at 1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636) Monday through Friday, 9 AM to 10 PM ET.

Get the facts on breast cancer

Because the causes of breast cancer are not fully known, there are many myths about the disease.

Myth	Fact
I'm only 35. Breast cancer happens only in older women.	While the risk of breast cancer increases with age, all women are at risk of getting breast cancer.
Only women with a family history of breast cancer get breast cancer.	Actually, most women who get breast cancer have no family history of the disease. However, a woman whose mother, sister or daughter had breast cancer has an increased risk. Having a male relative with breast cancer also increases risk.
If I don't have a BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene mutation, I won't get breast cancer.	Most women who get breast cancer do not have a *BRCA1* or *BRCA2* gene mutation. Only 5 to 10 percent of breast cancer cases in the U.S. are due to an inherited gene mutation.
Women with more than one risk factor will get breast cancer.	Most people diagnosed with breast cancer have no known risk factors except being a woman and getting older. All women are at risk.
You can prevent breast cancer.	Because the causes of breast cancer are not yet fully known, there is no definite way to prevent it. However, making healthy lifestyle choices may reduce the risk of breast cancer. For women at a high risk of breast cancer, certain drugs or surgery can reduce risk.
If I had a mammogram every year, I would be exposed to too much radiation, and that would cause cancer.	The level of radiation from mammograms is very small and has little impact on breast cancer risk. Studies show the benefits of mammography outweigh the risks, especially for women 50 and older.
Wearing deodorant increases my risk of getting breast cancer.	Studies have found no link between wearing deodorant and breast cancer risk.

For more information about risk factors go to www.komen.org/risk

Related fact sheets in this series:

- Screening and Early Detection
- Breast Density
- Genetics and Breast Cancer
- How Hormones Affect Breast Cancer

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