

# Breast Health Awareness

## Potential warning signs for breast cancer

Breast cancer is the most commonly occurring cancer in women across the globe. According to the World Cancer Research Fund International, there more than 2.26 million new cases of breast cancer in women in 2020. Such figures are sobering, but it's important to recognize that breast cancer survival rates have improved dramatically in recent decades, providing hope to the millions of women who may be diagnosed with the disease in the years to come.

Various factors have helped to improve breast cancer survival rates, and education about the disease is certainly among them. Women are their own greatest allies against breast cancer, and learning to spot its signs and symptoms is a great first step in the fight against this potentially deadly, yet treatable disease.

**Knowing your body**  
The American Cancer Society urges women to take note of how their breasts normally look and feel. That knowledge is vital because it helps women recognize when something does not look or feel good to the touch with their breasts. Screening alone may not be sufficient, as the ACS notes that mammograms do not find every breast cancer.

**Signs and symptoms**  
When women are well acquainted with how their breasts look and feel, they're in better position to recognize any abnormalities, which may or may not be indicative of breast cancer. The ACS reports that the following are some potential warning signs of breast cancer.

- A new lump or mass: The ACS indicates that this is the most common symptom of breast cancer. A lump or mass that is cancerous is often painless, but hard and has irregular edges. However, lumps caused by breast cancer also can be soft, round and tender. Some even cause pain.
- Swelling: Some women experience swelling of all or part of a breast even if they don't detect a lump.
- Dimpling: The skin on the breast may dimple. When this occurs, the skin on the breast sometimes mimics the look of an orange peel.
- Pain: Pain on the breast or nipple could indicate breast cancer.
- Retraction: Some women with breast cancer experience retraction, which occurs when the nipple turns inward.
- Skin abnormalities: Breast cancer may cause the skin on the breast to redden, dry out, flake, or thicken.
- Swollen lymph nodes: Some women with breast cancer experience swelling of the lymph nodes under the arm or near the collarbone.

The presence of any of these symptoms merits a trip to the doctor. Women with these symptoms should not immediately assume they have breast cancer, as the ACS notes that various symptoms of breast cancer also are indicative of non-cancerous conditions that affect the breasts. Only a physician can diagnose breast cancer, which underscores the importance of reporting symptoms to a doctor immediately.



**PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR BODY.** Women are urged to report any abnormalities in their breasts to a physician immediately.



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Statistics indicate there will be more than 256,000 new cases of breast cancer diagnosed in American and Canadian women this year, and breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in women of both countries. Thanks to early detection and treatment advances, survival rates have improved dramatically, but much room for progress remains. As diagnosis and treatment options continue to evolve, medical experts agree that early detection is a key factor in overcoming the disease, and performing a monthly breast self-exam is often vital to detecting abnormalities, including lumps or tenderness, in the breasts that may indicate illness. Take steps to protect yourself against breast cancer during Breast Cancer Awareness Month by initiating healthy lifestyle changes, beginning monthly breast self-exams, and talking to your doctor about the appropriate clinical breast exam and screening mammogram schedule for you.

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## Seven ways to reduce breast cancer risk



EAT HEALTHY. Diet in the role of breast cancer is still being studied. However, a diet high in vegetables and fruit, low in red and processed meats may lower your risk of breast cancer.

- Many women are concerned about the potential for developing breast cancer in their lifetimes. Breast cancer is the second-most common cancer among women in the United States and Canada. Despite that prevalence, there are ways for women to reduce their risk for breast cancer.
- While it is impossible to change family history or genetic markers like gene mutations that increase breast cancer risk, the following are seven ways women can lower their risk.
1. Exercise regularly and maintain a healthy weight. Physical activity and monitoring calories can keep weight in check. The Mayo Clinic recommends at least 150 minutes per week of moderate aerobic activity or 75 minutes per week of vigorous aerobic activity. Strength training at least twice a week also is recommended. Being overweight or obese increases a woman's risk for breast cancer.
  2. Consume a healthy diet. The link between diet and breast cancer risk is still being studied. However, research suggests that a diet high in vegetables and fruit, and calcium-rich dairy products, but low in red and processed meats may lower breast cancer risk.
  3. Avoid or limit alcohol consumptions. Alcohol increases risk of breast cancer, even in small amounts. For those who drink, no more than one alcoholic drink a day should be the limit. The more a woman drinks, the greater her risk of developing breast cancer, states the Mayo Clinic.
  4. Undergo genetic counseling and testing. Women concerned about a genetic connection or family history of breast cancer can speak to their doctor about testing and counseling that could help them reduce their risk. Preventive medicines and surgeries might help those at elevated risk for breast cancer.
  5. Limit hormone therapy. Combination hormone replacement therapy for post-menopausal women may increase risk of breast cancer, indicates the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Similarly, taking oral contraceptives during reproductive years may increase risk. Women can speak with their physicians to weigh the pros and cons of taking such hormones.
  6. Breastfeed children, if possible. Breastfeeding has been linked to reducing a woman's risk of developing breast cancer.
  7. Learn to detect breast cancer. Women should get to know their bodies so they can determine if something is awry as early as possible. Early detection of breast cancer increases the chances that treatment will prove successful.
- Women can embrace various strategies to reduce their risk of developing breast cancer.

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# Breast Health Awareness

## ACS Breast Cancer Screening Guidelines

American Cancer Society Recommendations for the Early Detection of Breast Cancer. These guidelines are for women at average risk for breast cancer. For screening purposes, a woman is considered to be at average risk if she doesn't have a personal history of breast cancer, a strong family history of breast cancer, or a genetic mutation known to increase risk of breast cancer (such as in a BRCA gene), and has not had chest radiation therapy before the age of 30.

- Women between 40 and 44 have the option to start screening with a mammogram every year.
- Women 45 to 54 should get mammograms every year.
- Women 55 and older can switch to a mammogram every other year, or they can choose to continue yearly mammograms. Screening should continue as long as a woman is in good health and is expected to live at least 10 more years.
- All women should understand what to expect when getting a mammogram for breast cancer screening – what the test can and cannot do.
- Clinical breast exams are not recommended for breast cancer screening among average-risk women at any age.

Courtesy American Cancer Society





## Count on us for your annual mammogram.

## Family history increases risk for breast cancer

Millions of people across the globe will be diagnosed with breast cancer this year. In fact, only certain skin cancers affect more women than breast cancer within the United States and Canada.

The World Cancer Research Fund International says breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in women across the globe. Belgium, The Netherlands and Luxembourg had the highest number of breast cancer cases in 2020, while Barbados and Fiji had the greatest number of deaths attributed to the disease. Some of these high case numbers may be attributed to women with family histories of breast cancer — something that increases risk significantly.

*BreastCancer.org* indicates that women with close relatives who have had breast cancer, such as sisters, mothers or grandmothers, are at considerably higher risk of developing breast cancer themselves.

Also, breast cancer may occur at a younger age in women with family histories of the disease.

Understanding breast cancer risk is vital for women's health. The following breakdown, courtesy of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, can help women from all backgrounds understand their risk for breast cancer.

- Average risk: No first- or second-degree relatives



with breast or ovarian cancer, or one second-degree female relative with breast cancer (in one breast only) diagnosed after age 50.

- Moderate risk: This is a somewhat higher risk that may not turn into breast cancer.

It occurs when there is one or two first-degree or two second-degree female relatives with breast cancer (in one breast only), with both relatives diagnosed after age 50; otherwise, one or two first- or second-degree relatives with high grade prostate cancer.

- Strong: Women with strong risks have much higher chances of developing breast cancer than the general population.

Conditions like having one or more first- or second-degree relatives with breast cancer diagnosed at age 45 or younger, triple negative breast cancer, primary cancer of both breasts, and both breast and ovarian cancer in the

same relative are warning signs of increased risk.

It's important for women with increased risk for breast cancer due to family history to discuss options with their doctors.

More frequent mammograms and other screening tests may be recommended, and screening at younger ages than the standard age also may be considered.

Women who are at high risk may be urged to undergo genetic counseling and testing for hereditary breast and ovarian cancer markers.

Breast cancer can be an especially scary prospect for women with family histories of the disease.

By familiarizing themselves with their risks for breast cancer, women can take the necessary steps to protect their long-term health.

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\*Source: Cancer.org



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# Breast Health Awareness

## Treatment options for breast cancer patients

Millions of women worldwide are diagnosed with breast cancer each year. Such a diagnosis is never welcome, but women should know that survival rates have improved dramatically in recent decades. In fact, the World Health Organization reports that, by the end of 2020, nearly eight million women were living despite having been diagnosed with breast cancer at some point in the previous half decade.

One of the reasons for the improved survival rates is the efficacy of various treatments. The National Breast Cancer Foundation, Inc.® notes that doctors have various options to treat breast cancer, and they often devise treatment plans that include some combination of treatments. Though no one wants to imagine receiving a breast cancer diagnosis, understanding the potential treatments for the disease can help women and their families be more prepared should that day ever arrive. The following are three treatment options physicians may discuss with women as they begin devising ways to overcome the disease.

## How ethnicity affects breast cancer risk

No one is immune to breast cancer. Even men can be diagnosed with breast cancer, though the threat of the disease looms much larger for women. In fact, the World Cancer Research Fund International reports that breast cancer is the most commonly occurring cancer in women across the globe. However, the World Health Organization indicates that, as of the end of 2020, roughly 7.8 million women who had been diagnosed with breast cancer in the previous five years were alive. So while no woman wants to receive a breast cancer diagnosis, millions of women worldwide are living testaments to the effectiveness of treatments for the disease.

There are various things women can do to increase their chances of surviving a breast cancer diagnosis. Recognizing one's own risk of developing the disease is especially important, as it may compel women to prioritize screening and make changes that could reduce their cancer risk.

There are many risk factors for breast cancer, and ethnicity is one of them. Data from the National Cancer Institute and the American Cancer Society indicates that breast cancer rates and survival rates differ among ethnic groups. Though the relationship between ethnicity and breast cancer is complicated and intertwined with other risk factors, data from the NCI and ACS indicates that incidence and death rates are higher among certain ethnic groups than others.

- Highest incidence rate: White, non-Hispanic
- Lowest incidence rate: Korean American
- Highest death rate: African American
- Lowest death rate: Chinese American

The MD Anderson Cancer Center notes that socioeconomic factors such as education and income level and access to medical screening and services undoubtedly affect incidence and death rates among different ethnicities. But other factors, such as cultural practices and beliefs within certain ethnic groups, also affect those rates. Women concerned about breast cancer are urged to prioritize screening for the disease and discuss factors such as diet, physical activity and cultural practices to determine if there's anything they can do to lower their cancer risk.

**1. Chemotherapy**  
Chemotherapy is used to treat various cancers, including breast cancer. Chemotherapy employs various drugs to destroy cancer cells or slow their growth. The drugs administered during chemotherapy are known as cytotoxic drugs and may be administered orally or intravenously. The NBCF notes that chemotherapy is offered to most patients, though doctors will consider a host of variables before deciding if chemotherapy is right for a given patient. Those variables include the type of tumor, its grade and its size.

**2. Radiation therapy**  
During radiation treatments, high energy rays are used to kill cancer cells. Only cells in the part of the body that is being treated with radiation are affected, so patients needn't worry that other parts of their body will be hit with radiation. The NBCF reports that patients diagnosed with Stage 0 (DCIS) and most diagnosed with Stage 1 invasive cancer or higher can expect doctors to prescribe radiation therapy. Women who have had a lumpectomy also are likely to be prescribed radiation. Two main kinds of radiation are generally considered for breast cancer patients. External beam breast cancer radiation treatment delivers cancer-killing rays through a large machine. Internal breast cancer radiation is a newer treatment that injects radioactive cancer-killing treatments into the affected area.

**3. Targeted therapy**  
The NBCF reports that targeted therapy is commonly used in combination with traditional chemotherapy. Targeted therapy attacks specific breast cancer cells without harming normal cells, which is why it tends to produce less severe side effects than chemotherapy treatments. Targeted therapy employs drugs to block the growth of cancer cells in very specific ways. One example cited by the NBCF is the drug Trastuzumab, or Herceptin®, which is given to women whose breast tumors have too much of the abnormal protein HER2. Though the side effects of targeted therapies tend to be less severe, women may still experience issues like fever and chills, nausea, headaches, and other symptoms after drugs have been administered.

Expanding breast cancer treatments have done much to improve survival rates for patients. Women diagnosed with the disease are urged to play an active role in their treatments and ask any questions they might have before, during and after being treated.



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