

Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Top 5 Breast Cancer Prevention Tips

Find out how dense you are - One of the newest ways to protect yourself is to learn whether you have dense breasts. When you have more tissue than fat in your breasts—which is common in younger women—it makes cancer harder to detect on a mammogram: Both tumors and breast tissue show up white, while fat looks dark. Even more important, having dense breasts makes your cancer risk up to 6 times higher. Experts aren't sure why that is, but one possibility is the fact that there is no standardization for measurement of breast density, so doctors' scores are subjective.

Get moving - Exercise seems to protect against breast cancer in several ways. First, it helps control weight. An American Cancer Society study found that women who'd gained 21 to 30 pounds since age 18 were 40% more likely to develop breast cancer than those who hadn't gained more than 5 pounds. The reason: estrogen, which can stimulate cell overgrowth and breast cancer. Before menopause, most of a woman's estrogen is produced by her ovaries; after menopause, when ovaries stop producing the hormone, most of the estrogen comes from fat tissue. The more fat in a woman's body, the more estrogen.

Know your family cancer history – even your dad's - About 5 to 10% of breast cancer is hereditary, passed from one generation to the next via a variety of

mutated genes. Your father's family counts as much as your mother's. And look at your family's history of other kinds of cancer, too. Men can carry some of the same aberrant genes, such as BRCA1 and 2, that up the risk of not only breast cancer but also ovarian cancer in women, pancreatic cancer in men and women, and early prostate and testicular cancers in men. Also, multiple diagnoses on either side of your family can be a clue to a hereditary link.

Eat the right foods – every day - Research continues to produce promising evidence that what you eat can affect your risk. For example, Harvard researchers recently found that women who had the highest carotenoid levels in their blood had a 19% lower risk of breast cancer than those with the lowest levels. Carotenoids are found in fruits and vegetables such as leafy greens, carrots, and red peppers. Women who consumed more carotenoids had an even lower risk of developing estrogen-receptor-negative breast cancer (which is often more aggressive). Other phytonutrients may also protect against breast cancer, including sulforaphane (found in cruciferous vegetables) and lycopene (the chemical that gives tomatoes their red color). The ACS recommends eating five or more servings of fruits and veggies a day, limiting processed and red meats, and choosing whole grains to help reduce risks of all types of cancer.

Detect it early - When breast cancer is caught early, the prognosis is often excellent. The 5-year survival rate for breast cancer that's found early and confined to the breast is 99%, says the American Cancer Society (ACS). Here's what you need to know.

• If you're of average risk (no family history), the US Preventative Services Task Force recommends having a mammogram and clinical breast exam every one to two years starting at age 50. Other experts and organizations including the ACS recommend starting mammograms in your early 40s. Speak with your doctor to determine the best plan is for you.

• Be familiar with how your breasts feel normally so that you can report any changes in appearance or texture to your doctor. Also, always notify your physician if you notice any bleeding or crusting on the nipples and if you experience any pain.

• Women at higher risk might want to start such screening much earlier and more often, and they might want to consider a screening MRI, as well.



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