

# Breast Cancer Prevention



## Risk Factors for Breast Cancer:

Risk for developing breast cancer is individual. It depends on a combination of lifestyle and personal traits. The following risk factors are strongly related to the disease and can alert you and your physician to the need for careful follow-up:

- A family history of breast cancer
- Age -- in general, the older you are, the greater your risk
- Never having borne a child
- Having first child after age 30
- First menstrual period at an early age
- A history of benign breast disease that required biopsies
- Other breast conditions

## Lifestyle Choices and More

**Diet and exercise as prevention strategies** Among the easiest things to control are what you eat and drink and how active you are. Here are some strategies that may help you decrease your risk of breast cancer:

**Limit alcohol** A strong link exists between alcohol consumption and breast cancer. To help protect against breast cancer, limit alcohol to less than one drink a day.

**Maintain a healthy weight** There's a clear link between obesity and breast cancer. Excess fatty tissue is a source of circulating estrogen in your body. And breast cancer risk is linked to how much estrogen you're exposed to in your lifetime.

**Stay physically active** Regular exercise can help you maintain a healthy weight and, as a consequence, may aid in lowering your risk of breast cancer. Aim for at least 30 minutes of exercise on most days of the week.

**Consider limiting fat in your diet** Results from the most definitive study of dietary fat and breast cancer risk to date suggest a slight decrease in risk of invasive breast cancer for women who eat a low-fat diet.

**Hormone therapy: Long-term use may undermine breast cancer prevention** Among other problems, long-term treat-

**Breast cancer is the most common type of cancer in North American women. It is a leading cause of cancer death, second only to lung cancer.**

ment with estrogen-progestin combinations, such as those found in the drug Prempro, increased the risk of breast cancer in women who participated in the trial. The WHI investigators also reported that women who developed breast cancer while in the study and who were taking hormone therapy had more aggressive and larger tumors.

**Exposure to pesticides** The molecular structure of some pesticides closely resembles that of estrogen. This means they may attach to estrogen receptor sites in your body. Although studies haven't found a definite link between most pesticides and breast cancer, researchers have learned that women with elevated levels of pesticides in their breast tissue have a greater breast cancer risk.

**Unnecessary antibiotics** Scientists recently found a link between antibiotic use and breast cancer — the longer antibiotics were used, the greater the risk of breast cancer.

**New directions in research** Scientists are continually making new discoveries that may impact breast cancer prevention. Among the most promising agents are retinoids and flaxseed.

**Retinoids** Natural or synthetic forms of vitamin A (retinoids) may have the ability to destroy or inhibit the growth of cancer cells. Unlike other experimental therapies, retinoids may be effective in premenopausal women and in those whose tumors aren't estrogen-positive.

**Flaxseed** Flaxseed is particularly high in one phytoestrogen, lignan, which appears to decrease estrogen production and which may inhibit the growth of some breast cancers.

**Do what you can** In addition to lifestyle changes, be vigilant about early detection of breast cancer. Start having yearly mammograms at age 40. If you notice any breast changes, such as a new lump or skin changes, make an appointment to see your doctor for evaluation.

Nothing you do can guarantee your life will be cancer-free. But if you practice healthy habits and consult your doctor about extra measures you can take, you may at least reduce your risk of this potentially fatal disease.

Source: MayoClinic and [www.breastcancerprevention.com](http://www.breastcancerprevention.com)

