

# HealthMatters

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**Breast cancer is the second most common cancer among women in the United States.**

In early stages, breast cancer may not cause symptoms. Mammograms are the best way to find breast cancer early, when it is easier to treat.

## Understanding breast cancer

### What is it?

Breast cancer is a disease in which cells in the breast grow out of control. When breast cancer spreads to other parts of the body, it is said to have metastasized.

A breast is made up of three main parts: lobules, ducts, and connective tissue. Most breast cancers begin in the ducts or lobules.

### Signs and symptoms

Breast cancer symptoms vary by person, and some people may not have any symptoms.

#### Warning signs may include:

- New lump in the breast or underarm (armpit)
- Thickening or swelling in part of the breast
- Irritation or dimpling of breast skin

- Redness or flaky skin in the nipple area of the breast
- Pulling in of the nipple or pain in the nipple area
- Nipple discharge other than breast milk, including blood
- Any change in the size or the shape of the breast
- Pain in any area of the breast

*These symptoms may happen with other conditions that are not cancerous.*

### Risk factors

Your risk for breast cancer is due to a combination of factors. The main factors that influence your risk include being a woman and age. Most breast cancers are diagnosed after age 50.

#### Some risk factors can be changed while others cannot:

- Family history of breast or ovarian cancer

- Physical inactivity
- Being overweight or obese after menopause
- Taking hormones
- Starting menstrual periods before age 12 and menopause after age 55
- Drinking alcohol
- Tobacco use

### Preventive testing

Mammograms play a key role in early breast cancer detection and help decrease breast cancer deaths. A mammogram is an X-ray image of your breasts used to screen for breast cancer. It is the best screening test available today to find breast cancer in most women. A mammogram can find breast cancer in a person years before physical symptoms develop.

**Talk to your provider** about your risk and what screening options are best for you.

# Healthy lifestyle choices can help reduce the risk of breast cancer

## Screening recommendation updates

**In May 2023, the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) issued new draft recommendations for breast cancer screening.**

In short, the task force now recommends women:

- Start breast cancer screening at age 40 instead of the previously recommended age of 50
- Get screening mammograms every other year from ages 40 to 74

Additionally, the USPSTF highlighted the need for more research into screening disparities faced by different racial groups in the U.S. and into the benefits of breast ultrasound and MRI for women with dense breasts.

## Lifestyle-related breast cancer risks

### Maintain a healthy weight

Having more fat tissue can increase your chance of getting breast cancer by raising estrogen levels. Also, women who are overweight tend to have higher levels of insulin, another hormone. If you're carrying extra pounds, losing as little as 5%-10% of your weight improves your overall health.

### Limit alcohol

Alcohol is a strong risk factor for many cancers, including breast cancer. Limit alcohol to one drink or less a day for women and two drinks or less a day for men.

*Did you know? Women who have 2-3 alcoholic drinks per day have a 20% higher risk of breast cancer than women who don't drink alcohol.*

### Stop using tobacco

Tobacco use can cause cancer almost anywhere in the body. Smoke from cigarettes, cigars, and pipes has at least 70 cancer causing chemicals, many of which can damage DNA.

## Want to learn more?

Contact your provider to discuss lifestyle habits to reduce your risk today!

#### Sources:

Breast Cancer | CDC, accessed 07/01/2024

USPSTF Breast Cancer Screening Guidelines | BCRF, accessed 07/01/2024

How Your Weight May Affect Your Risk of Breast Cancer | American Cancer Society, accessed 07/01/2024

Antioxidants: What They Do and Antioxidant-Rich Foods | Cleveland Clinic, accessed 07/01/2024

Breast Cancer Risk: Drinking Alcohol | Susan G. Komen®, accessed 07/01/2024

Tobacco and Cancer | CDC, accessed 07/01/2024

## Nutrition for breast cancer prevention

Eating a diet that includes whole fruits, vegetables, grains, legumes, nuts, fish, and unsaturated fats can help to reduce the risk of breast cancer.

## Antioxidant-rich foods and vitamins

Antioxidants are chemicals naturally produced in foods. They help protect the body from free radicals and oxidative stress, which is often thought to contribute to inflammatory conditions, certain cancers, the process of aging, and the increased risk of developing chronic disease.

- **Vitamin C:** Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, sweet potatoes, bell peppers, tomatoes, and citrus fruits
- **Vitamin D:** Salmon, oysters, herring, and tuna fish. You can also find fortified orange juice or cereals.
- **Vitamin E:** Almonds, avocado, sunflower seeds, oatmeal, and legumes (beans, lentils, split peas)
- **Beta carotene:** Apricots, cantaloupe, mangos, carrots, grapefruit, and bell peppers
- **Selenium:** Eggs, tuna, salmon, brown rice, onions, and many other vegetables

## Limit or avoid processed foods

- **Reduce red or processed meats:** Limit beef, hot dogs, bacon, and sausage. Choose baked chicken, fish or fiber-rich beans more often.
- **Reduce highly processed:** Including fast food, packaged snack foods like chips, cookies, baked goods, and candy.
- **Avoid sugary beverages:** such as sweetened coffee, tea, and soft drinks.