

- Breast cancer

How to reduce your risk

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If you're concerned about getting breast cancer, you might wonder what you can do to help prevent it. You can't change some risk factors, such as family history. But you can make lifestyle changes to lower your risk.

What can I do to lower my risk of breast cancer?

Research shows that lifestyle changes can lower the chances of getting breast cancer, even in people at high risk. To lower your risk:

Limit or stay away from alcohol.

It's safest not to drink alcohol. But if you do drink it, enjoy it in moderation. The more alcohol you have, the greater your risk of getting breast cancer. In general, women should have no more than one drink a day. Even small amounts raise the risk of breast cancer. One drink is about 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits.

Ask a member of your healthcare team whether your weight is healthy. If it is, work to maintain that weight. If you need to lose weight, ask your healthcare professional how. Simple steps may help. Watch your portion sizes. Try to eat fewer calories. And slowly build up the amount of

Stay at a healthy weight.
exercise you do.

Get active. Physical activity can help you stay at a healthy weight, which helps prevent breast cancer. So try to move more and sit less. Most healthy adults should aim for at least 150 minutes a week of moderate aerobic exercise. Or try to get at least 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic exercise a week. Aerobic exercise gets your heart pumping. Some examples are walking, biking, running and swimming. Also, aim to do strength training at least twice a week.

Breastfeed. If you have a baby, breastfeeding might play a role in helping prevent breast cancer. The longer you breastfeed, the greater the protective effect.

Limit hormone therapy after menopause. Combination hormone therapy uses estrogen and progestin. It may raise the risk of breast cancer. Talk with your healthcare professional about the risks and benefits of hormone therapy. You might be able to manage your symptoms with treatments and medicines that don't use hormones. If you decide that the benefits of short-term hormone therapy outweigh the risks, use the lowest amount that works for you. Have your healthcare team track the length of time you take hormones.

Studies show that estrogen alone in people who have had hysterectomies does not raise breast cancer risk. Estrogen is linked with a small increase in blood clots and stroke risk. If you smoke, quit. Some research suggests that smoking tobacco raises the risk of breast cancer. Breathing in another person's cigarette smoke also may raise the risk. If you or a loved one needs help quitting, talk with a member of your healthcare team.

Can a healthy diet help prevent breast cancer?

Eating a healthy diet might lower your risk of some types of cancer. It also might lower the odds of getting diabetes and heart disease or having a stroke.

Some research suggests that people who eat a Mediterranean diet might have a lower risk of breast cancer, especially after menopause. The Mediterranean diet focuses mostly on plant foods. It includes fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes and nuts. People who follow the Mediterranean diet choose healthy fats such as extra-virgin olive oil over butter. And they eat fish instead of red meat.

A balanced diet can help you stay at a healthy weight. And healthy weight is a key factor in helping prevent breast cancer.

Is there a link between birth control pills and breast cancer?

There's some evidence that hormonal types of birth control raise the risk of breast cancer. These include birth control pills and intrauterine devices (IUDs) that release hormones.

But the risk is minimal. And it drops after you stop using hormonal birth control.

Talk with a member of your healthcare team about your birth control options. Your healthcare professional can help you weigh the benefits and risks. The benefits of birth control pills include:

Controlling menstrual bleeding. Preventing unwanted pregnancy.

Lowering the risk of other cancers, such as endometrial cancer and ovarian cancer.

What else can I do?

If you notice any changes in how your breasts look or feel, tell a member of your healthcare team right away. For example, get a checkup if you feel a new lump or see skin changes.

Ask your healthcare professional when to start mammograms and other screening tests based on your medical history. Some people have a higher risk of breast cancer. This can be due to things such as having a family history of the disease or certain gene changes. If your health care professional tells you that your risk is higher, you may be advised to take steps such as:

Genetic counseling and testing. More frequent breast exams. Breast cancer screening tests at an earlier age.

Medicines or surgery to prevent breast cancer.

Breast cancer prevention starts with healthy habits such as limiting alcohol and staying physically active. Learn what you can do to lower your breast cancer risk.

The information provided is for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace the advice of your doctor or other health care provider. We encourage you to discuss any questions or concerns you may have with your provider.