FACTS FOR LIFE

Breast Cancer Risk Factors

What affects your risk of getting breast cancer?

The causes of breast cancer are not fully known. However, researchers have identified a number of factors that increase one's chances of getting breast cancer. These are called risk factors. Risk factors do not cause breast cancer, but can increase the chances of getting breast cancer. Some women have many risk factors, but never get breast cancer. And, some women have no risk factors aside from being a woman and getting older, and still get the disease. Talk to your health care provider about your personal risk.

There are some risk factors you can control, and others you cannot. Even if you do not have any of these risk factors, you can still develop breast cancer.

Age: a major factor

A woman's chance of getting breast cancer increases with age. Your chance by your current age is:

age 20	1 in 1,681
age 30	1 in 232
age 40	1 in 69
age 50	1 in 42
age 60	1 in 29
age 70	1 in 27
Lifetime	1 in 8

Source: American Cancer Society Breast Cancer Facts & Figures 2011-2012.

Factors that may increase your risk of breast cancer

- being a woman
- getting older — the older you get, the greater your risk of breast cancer
- having an inherited mutation in the BRCA1 or BRCA2 breast cancer genes
- a personal history of breast or ovarian cancer
- a family history of breast cancer
- having high breast density on a mammogram
- having a previous biopsy showing hyperplasia
- lobular carcinoma in situ (LCIS)
- being exposed to large amounts of radiation at a young age
- never having children
- having your first child after age 35
- high levels of blood androgrens or estrogens
- postmenopausal hormone use (current or recent use) of estrogen or estrogen plus progestin
- being overweight after menopause or gaining weight as an adult
- high bone density
- having more than one drink of alcohol per day
- starting menopause after age 55
- being younger than 12 at the time of your first period
- current or recent use of birth control pills

Get the facts on breast cancer

Because the causes and cures of breast cancer are not yet fully known, there are many myths about the disease. Here is what do we know:

Myth	Fact
I'm only 35. Breast cancer happens only in older women.	While the risk of breast cancer increases with age, all women are at risk for getting breast cancer.
Women with a family history of breast cancer typically get breast cancer.	Actually, most women who get breast cancer have no family history of the disease. However, a woman whose mother, sister or daughter had breast cancer has an increased risk. Having a male relative with breast cancer, can also increase your risk.
If I don't have a mutated BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene, I won't get breast cancer.	Just because you do not have a mutated BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene, you can still get breast cancer. About 90 to 95 percent of women who get breast cancer actually do not have an inherited form of breast cancer, or a mutated BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene.[1]
Women with more than one risk factor typically get breast cancer.	Most women diagnosed with breast cancer have no known risk factors except being a woman and getting older. All women are at risk.
You can prevent breast cancer.	Because the causes of breast cancer are not yet fully known, there is no way to prevent it. However, the drugs tamoxifen or raloxifene can help reduce the risk. Making healthy lifestyle choices may also reduce the risk of breast cancer.
If I had a mammogram every year, I would be exposed to too much radiation, and that would cause cancer.	The small level of radiation from mammograms is believed to be safe, with the benefits outweighing the risks.[2]
Breastfeeding can increase my risk of breast cancer.	Breastfeeding decreases a woman's risk of getting premenopausal breast cancer.

For more information about risk factors go to www.komen.org/risk

1 American Cancer Society, Breast Cancer Facts & Figures 2011-2012.
2 American College of Radiology, www.radiologyinfo.org.

Related fact sheets in this series:

- Breast Cancer Detection
- Breast Density
- Genetics and Breast Cancer
- How Hormones Affect Breast Cancer

Susan G. Komen for the Cure is not a health care provider and does not give medical advice. The information provided in this material is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or to replace the services of a medical professional.

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