



# Breast Cancer Risk



**1 in 8 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime.** It is the second most common cancer in women and the second most common cause of cancer death in women in the US. By knowing your risk, you can make an informed choice that is best for you.

## Breast Cancer Risk Factors

A **risk factor** is anything that increases your chances of getting a disease, such as breast cancer.

Most people who get breast cancer have few or no known risk factors. Risk factors only make it more likely that a person will develop breast cancer.

Having a risk factor does **not** mean that you will definitely get breast cancer. Risk factors **cannot** tell if a person will or will not get breast cancer.

Depending on your risk factors, your health care provider might suggest different types of tests or recommend that you start breast cancer screening earlier.

That's why it's important to talk to a health care provider about your risk factors. Together, you can decide the best breast cancer screening plan for you.

## Risk Factors You Can Change

Some breast cancers might be prevented with lifestyle changes. Here are some risk factors you can change to lower your risk:

**It's best not to drink alcohol.** The risk for breast cancer increases as you drink more alcohol.

**Be as active as possible.** Women who get regular physical activity have a 10% to 20% lower risk of breast cancer.

Aim for 2½ to 5 hours of activity each week. If you aren't active now, start slowly and build up over time.

**Get to and stay at a healthy weight.** Excess body fat can increase your risk of breast cancer. Ask your health care team what a healthy weight means for you.

**If you currently take or are thinking about taking hormone therapy,** talk to a doctor about the risks and benefits.

**Breastfeeding** might slightly lower your risk.

**Know your family history.** Your risk increases if one or more of your relatives has (or has had) breast cancer.

## Risk Factors You Cannot Change

Some breast cancer risk factors can't be changed. But it's important to know if you have them so you can discuss your risk with a health care provider. Some of these risk factors increase your risk more than others.

**Personal history of breast cancer.** If you've had breast cancer in one breast, you have a higher risk of developing a new cancer in the other breast, or another part of the same breast.

**Family history of breast cancer.** If you have a first-degree relative (parent, sibling, or child), your risk is almost double. If you have two first-degree relatives, your risk is about three-fold.

**Inherited gene changes.** About 5% to 10% of all female breast cancers are related to inherited gene mutations (DNA changes passed down from a parent).

- On average, a woman with a *BRCA1* or *BRCA2* mutation has up to a 7 in 10 chance of getting breast cancer by age 80. This risk goes up if more family members have had breast cancer.
- Other less common gene mutations (such as *PALB2* or *TP53*) can also cause inherited breast cancer.

If you have a family history of breast cancer or inherited gene changes, your health care provider may have you see a genetic counselor. They may also suggest certain medicines or procedures to help reduce your risk.

**Radiation to the chest.** People who've had radiation near the chest have a much higher risk of breast cancer.

**Dense breast tissue.** People whose breasts appear dense on mammograms have a higher risk of breast cancer. Dense breast tissue can also make it harder to see cancers on mammograms.

**Certain breast conditions.** Some noncancerous (benign) breast conditions may increase breast cancer risk.

**Years of menstruation.** If you started menstrual periods before age 11 or went through menopause after age 55, you might have a slightly increased risk of breast cancer due to a longer lifetime exposure to estrogen and progesterone.

**Exposure to diethylstilbestrol (DES).** Women who were given an estrogen-like drug called DES during pregnancy have a slightly increased risk of breast cancer.

**Being taller.** Taller women have a higher risk of breast cancer. The reasons aren't clear, but it might be related to factors that affect early growth.

**Age.** Most breast cancers are found in women 55 and older, but women of any age can get breast cancer.

**Biological sex.** Anyone can get breast cancer, but it is much more common in those who were born female.

**Talk to your health care provider about your risk factors and breast cancer screening.**

## Male Breast Cancers

Breast cancer in people who were born male is rare, but it can happen. When it does, it's more likely to be diagnosed at a later or more advanced stage. Risk factors for male breast cancer include:

- *BRCA1* or *BRCA2* gene mutations
- Family history of breast or ovarian cancer
- Klinefelter syndrome
- Testicular disorders
- Gynecomastia (enlarged breasts)
- Diabetes and obesity

## Disparities in Breast Cancer

While breast cancer is slightly more common in White women, death rates for Black women are 40% higher.

- Black women are more often diagnosed at a later stage, when cancer is more likely to have spread and can be harder to treat.
- Black women have higher rates of triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC), an aggressive type of breast cancer. TNBC is also more likely to develop in women who haven't gone through menopause and are younger.
- Although *BRCA1* and *BRCA2* gene changes are more common in Black women, these individuals are less likely to get or be offered genetic testing.

### Breast Cancer Risk Assessment Tools

Risk assessment tools can help give an estimate of your breast cancer risk based on different factors.

There is no standard tool, so different tools might give different risk estimates for the same person.

One is the National Cancer Institute Breast Cancer Risk Assessment Tool (BCRAT), also known as the Gail Model. It estimates your risk of getting invasive breast cancer in the next 5 years and over your lifetime.

Please know: Risk assessment tools can't predict if you will or won't get breast cancer. You should always discuss results with a health care provider.



Visit the American Cancer Society website at [cancer.org/breastcancer](https://cancer.org/breastcancer) or call us at **1-800-227-2345** to learn more. We're here when you need us.

