

Make Healthy Lifestyle Choices

Here are some healthy lifestyle choices you can make that may reduce the risk of some types of breast cancer for some people.

1. Maintain a healthy weight

- Gaining weight after menopause increases the risk of breast cancer.
- Weight gain of 20 pounds or more after the age of 18 may increase your risk of breast cancer.
- If you have gained weight, losing weight may lower your risk of breast cancer.

2. Add exercise to your routine

Physical activity involves the energy that you release from your body. It not only burns energy (calories), but may also help lower the risk of breast cancer, especially for postmenopausal women. This is because exercise may lower estrogen levels, fight obesity and may boost the function of immune system cells that attack tumors. Here is all it takes to get started:

- Before you start an exercise program, see your doctor if you:
 - Have been inactive for a long time
 - Are overweight
 - Have a high risk of heart disease
 - Have a high risk of other chronic health problems
- Include physical activity in your daily routine. All you need is moderate (where you break a sweat) activity — like brisk walking for 30 minutes a day.



Leading a healthy lifestyle will not get rid of your risk of serious health problems like cancer, but it may lower your risk.

- Do whatever physical activity you enjoy most and gets you moving.
- After exercising, think about how good you feel. Use that feeling to motivate you the next time.

If you are already physically active, keep up the good work.

3. Limit alcohol intake

You may have heard about research that showed having one serving of alcohol (for example, a glass of red wine) each day improves your health by reducing your risk of heart disease. While that may be true, many studies have also shown that drinking alcohol can increase the risk of breast cancer. In general, the more alcohol you drink, the higher your risk of developing breast cancer. If you drink alcohol, have less than one drink a day. Getting enough folic acid may lower the risk linked to drinking alcohol. Folic acid can be found in multivitamins, oranges, orange juice, green vegetables and fortified breakfast cereals.

4. Limit postmenopausal hormones

For each year that combined estrogen plus progestin hormones are taken, the risk of breast cancer goes up. Once they are stopped, this increased risk returns to that of a woman who has never used hormones in about five to ten years. Menopausal hormones also increase the risk of ovarian cancer and other health conditions. Talk to your doctor about the risks and benefits.



Healthy living is not just about keeping your body free of disease.

5. Breastfeed, if you can

Breastfeeding protects against breast cancer, especially in premenopausal women.

Here are some other healthy lifestyle choices to consider:

Emotional health

It is also important to keep a healthy attitude. Here are some ways to help support your emotional health:

- Do things that make you happy and that bring balance to your life. Pay attention to yourself and your needs. Go to the library. Read a book. Take a walk in the park. Have coffee with a friend.
- Trust yourself. Many things can help you be healthier and feel better about yourself. Being in touch with “your spiritual self” through meditation or prayer may help you gain inner peace — in spite of what is going on in your life.

Let there be no smoke

If you don't smoke, don't start. Although the link to breast cancer is not clear at this time, you have done your body a world of good by not smoking. If you do smoke, please ask your doctor for help in quitting. Although there is growing evidence that smoking may slightly increase the risk of breast cancer, overall, study findings remain mixed. Still, smoking has been linked to many other types of cancer and diseases. There are health benefits from quitting at any age.

Breast Self-Awareness Messages

1. Know your risk
2. Get screened
3. Know what is normal for you
4. Make healthy lifestyle choices

Related fact sheets in this series:

- Breast Cancer Risk Factors
- Mammography