

# Breast Cancer: *What You Need to Know*

*Cancer* is a disease in which cells in the body grow out of control. When cancer starts in the breast, it is called *breast cancer*. Except for skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common cancer in American women.

Breast cancer *screening* means checking a woman's breasts for cancer before she has any symptoms. A *mammogram* is an X-ray picture of the breast. Mammograms are the best way to find breast cancer early, when it is easier to treat and before it is big enough to feel or cause symptoms.

**Most women who are 50 to 74 years old should have a screening mammogram every two years.** If you are 40 to 49 years old, or think you may have a higher risk of breast cancer, ask your doctor when to have a screening mammogram.



## Some things may increase your risk

The main factors that influence your breast cancer risk are being a woman and getting older. Other risk factors include—

- Changes in breast cancer-related genes (BRCA1 or BRCA2).
- Having your first menstrual period before age 12.
- Never giving birth, or being older when your first child is born.
- Starting menopause after age 55.
- Taking hormones to replace missing estrogen and progesterone in menopause for more than five years.
- Taking oral contraceptives (birth control pills).
- A personal history of breast cancer, dense breasts, or some other breast problems.
- A family history of breast cancer (parent, sibling, or child).
- Getting radiation therapy to the breast or chest.
- Being overweight, especially after menopause.

## Symptoms

Some warning signs of breast cancer are—

- New lump in the breast or underarm (armpit).
- Thickening or swelling of part of the breast.
- Irritation or dimpling of breast skin.
- Redness or flaky skin in the nipple area or 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 the breast.

Other conditions can cause these symptoms. *If you have any signs that worry you, call your doctor right away.*

### More Information

[www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/) • (800) CDC-INFO (800-232-4636) • TTY: (888) 232-6348

### Can't afford a mammogram?

If you have a low income or do not have insurance and are between the ages of 40 and 64, you may qualify for a free or low-cost mammogram through CDC's National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program. To learn more, call (800) CDC-INFO.



## BREAST CANCER IN YOUNG WOMEN

Cancer is a disease in which cells in the body grow out of control. When cancer starts in the breast, it is called breast cancer. Except for skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common cancer in American women.

Most breast cancers are found in women who are 50 and older, but breast cancer also affects younger women. About 11% of all new cases of breast cancer in the United States are found in women younger than 45 years of age. While breast cancer diagnosis and treatment are difficult for women of any age, younger women may find this experience overwhelming.



### WHO HAS A HIGHER RISK?

Some young women are at a higher risk for getting breast cancer at an early age compared with other women their age. If you are a woman younger than age 45, you may have a higher risk if—

- You have close relatives who were diagnosed with breast or ovarian cancer (particularly at age 45 or younger).
- You have changes in certain breast cancer genes (BRCA1 and BRCA2).
- You are of Ashkenazi Jewish heritage.
- You were treated with radiation therapy to the breast or chest in childhood or early adulthood.
- You have had breast cancer or other breast health problems such as lobular carcinoma in situ (LCIS), ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS), atypical ductal hyperplasia, or atypical lobular hyperplasia.



If you think you are at higher risk, talk to your doctor. Your doctor may refer you to a genetic counselor, recommend that you get screened earlier and more frequently, and consider medicines or surgeries that can lower your risk.

You have an average risk of getting breast cancer at a young age if the risk factors listed don't apply to you. If you are at average risk, it is important for you to know how your breasts normally look and feel. Talk to your doctor if you notice any changes in your breasts. Aside from genetics, little is known about what causes breast cancer in women younger than 45 years of age.





## WHAT CAN I DO TO **REDUCE MY RISK OF BREAST CANCER?**

Many factors can influence your breast cancer risk, and most women who develop breast cancer do not have any known risk factors or a history of the disease in their families. However, you can help lower your risk of breast cancer in the following ways—

- Keep a healthy weight.
- Exercise regularly (at least four hours a week).
- Don't drink alcohol, or limit alcoholic drinks to no more than one per day.
- Avoid exposure to chemicals that can cause cancer (carcinogens).
- Try to reduce your exposure to radiation during medical tests like mammograms, X-rays, CT scans, and PET scans.
- If you are taking, or have been told to take, hormone replacement therapy or oral contraceptives (birth control pills), ask your doctor about the risks and find out if it is right for you.
- Breastfeed your babies, if possible.

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### More Information

[www.cdc.gov/BringYourBrave](http://www.cdc.gov/BringYourBrave) | Facebook: [CDCBreastCancer](https://www.facebook.com/CDCBreastCancer) Twitter: [@CDC\\_Cancer](https://twitter.com/CDC_Cancer)  
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