Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

What You Can Do to Prevent Breast Cancer

Know Your Risk for Breast Cancer

A risk factor is anything that increases your chance of getting a disease, such as cancer. Important risk factors for breast cancer include your age, family history, and sex assigned at birth. Most breast cancers are in women who were assigned female at birth. However, people of all genders can get breast cancer.

If you are a transgender man or a nonbinary person, you can still be at risk for breast cancer. This is true even if you had top surgery.

Ask your healthcare provider about the risk of getting breast cancer in your lifetime. This is called your lifetime risk. Your lifetime risk determines if you're at average, intermediate, or high risk for getting breast cancer.

Average Risk for Breast Cancer

You're at average risk if you were assigned female at birth (your gender now does not matter) and you do not have:

- A history of:
  - A hereditary syndrome, such as a mutation (change or variant) in your BRCA or other genes.
  - Invasive breast cancer or ductal carcinoma *in situ* (DCIS).
  - Atypical hyperplasia or lobular carcinoma *in situ* (LCIS). This is a type of

breast disease that is not cancer.

- Dense breasts. A mammogram will show if you have dense breasts.
- Breast cancer in your family (blood relatives). This is different for everyone. Your healthcare provider will assess your risk.
- Radiation therapy to your chest when you were young.

For information on higher risk for breast cancer, visit MSK's Breast Cancer Screening Guidelines.

1 in 6 breast cancers are in females ages 40 to 49.

Know the Symptoms of Breast Cancer

New lumps, swelling, or redness of your breasts are usually the first symptoms of breast cancer. The best way to find symptoms early is to notice changes in your breasts. Practicing breast self-awareness and doing breast self-exams can help.

Breast self-awareness means being familiar with how your breasts normally look and feel. Everyone should practice breast self-awareness. This way, you can notice any changes in your breasts. Call your healthcare provider if you see any changes, such as a new lump or discharge from your nipple.

A breast self-exam (BSE) is a way to examine your breasts on a regular basis to look for any changes. You can do BSEs once a month, sometimes, or not at all. If you choose not to do a BSE, you should still make sure you know how your breasts normally look and feel.

It's important not to panic if you see or feel a change in your breast. Most breast changes are not caused by cancer.

Some males are more likely to get breast cancer because of genetic mutations such as BRCA. If you have a genetic mutation, start BSEs at age 35.

Healthy Habits to Lower Your Breast Cancer Risk

Some risk factors like family history and age can't be changed. But keeping in good overall health can improve your breast health. Here are some tips for staying healthy:

- Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables.
- Limit the amount of sugar and fat you eat and drink.
- Do not smoke or use tobacco products.
- Limit the amount of alcohol you drink.
- Be active and exercise regularly.
- Protect yourself from the sun and don't use tanning beds.
- Have regular checkups by your healthcare provider.

Research shows that healthy habits can lower your risk for breast cancer.

Get Screened for Breast Cancer

The type of screening you have and your screening schedule are based on your personal risk for breast cancer.

If You're at Average Risk:

- Starting at age 20, become familiar with how your breasts look and feel. Knowing your breasts will help you notice changes.
- Get a breast exam from your healthcare provider every year starting at age

25.

- Starting at age 40, have a mammogram or tomosynthesis (3D mammogram) every year.

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1 in 8 females will be diagnosed with breast cancer.

Actions You Can Take Today

- Learn if you're at average, intermediate, or high risk for getting breast cancer in your lifetime.
- Notice changes in your breasts through breast self-awareness.
- Stay healthy and maintain healthy habits.
- Get screened for breast cancer based on your lifetime risk. Call 833-376-1194 to schedule your mammogram.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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