



October: National Breast Cancer Month

Reducing your risk of Breast Cancer can be very challenging, especially considering the major risk factors are non-modifiable. These risk factors include:

- Being a Women
- Age
- Genetics
- Family History

These risk factors are considered non-modifiable because there is nothing you can do to change them to reduce your chance of Breast Cancer. While we can't control how old we are or what family we were born into research is finding more and more modifiable risk factors. These risk factors can be controlled and include:

- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Exercising regularly
- Limiting alcohol
- Eating nutritious foods
- Never smoking (Or quitting if you do smoke)
- Breastfeeding history
- Exposure to chemicals in cosmetics

Being overweight or obese is defined as having a BMI (body mass index) over 25. These women have a higher risk of being diagnosed with breast cancer compared to women who maintain a healthy weight, especially after menopause. Talk with your doctor about your BMI, how often you should exercise and what changes you can make to your diet for an effective weight loss.

Regular Exercise has been linked to a lower risk of breast cancer. Research shows that moderate to intense exercise as little as 4 hours a week could lower the risk of breast cancer. Exercise can help maintain a healthy weight, which will reduce fat cells. Fat cells make estrogen and extra fat cells will make extra estrogen. Breasts exposed to extra estrogen over time, there is an increase chance of developing breast cancer. Talk to your doctor about gradually and safely starting an exercise program that is right for you.

Drinking Alcohol has consistently been linked to increasing a women's risk of breast cancer. Alcohol can increase levels of estrogen and may also increase risk by damaging DNA in cells. Most women can safely enjoy less than five alcoholic drinks per week.

Consult with your doctor to find out how much alcohol you can safely consume.

Unhealthy eating habits are thought to be partly responsible for about 30% to 40% of all cancers. Healthy eating habits can boost your immune system, and help keep risk for breast cancer as low as possible. Research has shown that getting the nutrients you need from a variety of foods, especially fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains, give bodies the energy they need to stay healthy.

Smoking causes a number of diseases and is linked to a higher risk of breast cancer in younger, premenopausal women. Research also has shown that there may be a link between very heavy secondhand smoke exposure and breast cancer risk in postmenopausal women. If you are a smoker, talk with your doctor about quitting with medication or through available community resources.

Breastfeeding can reduce breast cancer risk, especially if a women breast feds for longer than 1 year. There is less benefit for women who breastfeed for less than a year. Most women will have fewer menstrual cycles when they're breastfeeding resulting in lower estrogen levels. Besides possibly lowering your breast cancer risk, breastfeeding gives your child antibodies through the breast milk that can protect him/her from bacterial and viral infections.

Research strongly suggests that the **chemicals in cosmetics** at c at certain exposure levels may contribute to the development of cancer in people. Many of these chemicals are considered hormone disruptors. Hormone disruptors can affect how estrogen and other hormones act in the body, by blocking them or mimicking them, which throws off the body's hormonal balance. Parabens and Phthalates are the two groups of chemicals that are being studied for links to breast cancer. Visit the Environmental Working Group's (EWG) Skin Deep website to search cosmetic products to see how safe they are.

The list above does not include all of the modifiable risk factors.

Please visit <http://www.breastcancer.org/risk/factors/woman.jsp> for more information!

