

Making Healthy Lifestyle Choices

There are five healthy lifestyle choices you can make that may reduce your risk of breast cancer.

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. This is because exercise lowers estrogen levels, fights obesity, lowers insulin levels and boosts the function of immune system cells that attack tumors. Here is all it takes to get started:

- If you have been inactive for a long time, are overweight, have a high risk of heart disease or some other chronic health problem, see your doctor before starting an exercise program.
- Include physical activity into your daily routine. All you need is moderate (where you break a sweat) activity — like brisk walking for 30 minutes a day.
- Do whatever physical activity you enjoy most and gets you moving.



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

- After exercising, think about how good you feel about your body and yourself. 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 wine) each day improves your health by reducing your risk of heart attack. That is true, but many studies have also shown that alcohol intake 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, limit to 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 postmenopausal hormones are taken, the risk of breast cancer goes up. Once the drug is no longer taken, this risk returns to that of a woman who has never used hormones in about five to ten years. Postmenopausal hormones also increase the risk of ovarian cancer and heart disease. 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. Breastfeeding has other benefits for the mother, including lowering the risk of:

- Type 2 diabetes
- Ovarian cancer

And, breastfeeding has many benefits for the child as well.

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 and pick out 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 the spiritual part of you through meditation or prayer can 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, you have done your body a world of good by avoiding tobacco. If you do smoke, please ask your doctor for help in quitting. Smoking has been linked to many other types of cancer and conditions. There are health benefits from quitting at any age. And after five years of being smoke-free, the risk of developing diseases as a result of having smoked goes down.

Breast self-awareness

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