

## Breast Cancer Awareness Month

### Breast Cancer Awareness/Prevention

Celebrate life by taking action during Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Fortunately, there are many things you can do to protect your own health or encourage loved ones to do the same. While there are some risk factors you can't change, there are many ways you can alter your lifestyle that positively impact your risk for all cancers as well as benefit your overall health and wellbeing.

#### Exercise away the risk

The American Cancer Society recommends 45 to 60 minutes of physical activity (with intent) on five or more days a week to reduce risks. But before you say "that's too much," there's a study saying that as little as 10 minutes or more per day (75 minutes per week) can reduce a woman's risk for breast cancer by 18%! Decide how many days per week you can exercise and put it into your calendar to start reducing your risk today!

#### Lose Pounds

Excess fat tissue can raise estrogen levels, which may increase your chance of developing breast cancer, especially after menopause. The increased insulin levels associated with being overweight are also linked to breast cancer. If you are carrying excess body weight, pick one thing you can do starting today to decrease your calorie intake. One place to begin is by cutting back on fried foods or packaged snack foods like crackers, cookies, and chips.



#### Drink in Moderation

The amount of alcohol a woman drinks may impact her breast cancer risk. While women who have one alcoholic drink a day have a very small increase in risk compared to non-drinkers, those who consume two to five drinks a day have one and a half times the risk of non-drinkers. Excess alcohol intake also increases the risk of developing other cancers. If you're currently consuming more than the recommended one alcoholic drink a day, you can perhaps set a goal to cut back.

## Childbearing

While the decision to have children and when to have them is very personal, it is also something that may not be entirely within a woman's control. What we do know about childbearing and breast cancer risk is that women who have children at an earlier age (by age 20) have lower rates of breast cancer as do women who give birth to more than four children. Another uncontrollable factor is the age that a woman starts her menstrual cycle. Women who started their menstrual cycle before the age of 12 have a higher likelihood of developing breast cancer. The common link in all of these factors is the amount of exposure to certain hormones over the course of a female's lifetime. Later menses and more children mean fewer menstrual cycles and exposure to hormones that are linked to breast cancer.

If you find that you may be at increased risk because you didn't have children or fall into one of the other scenarios mentioned above, don't worry. Most women don't have more than four children; a lot of women have children after the age of 20; and maybe you can't remember when you started your menstrual cycle. If you are at all concerned, talk to your doctor, AND focus on the things that are within your control such as weight, physical activity, and nutrition.

## Hormone Therapy for Menopause

Discuss the pros and cons of managing menopausal symptoms through hormone therapies with your doctor. Review the severity of your symptoms as well as how taking or not taking hormones will affect your risk for breast cancer, heart disease, and osteoporosis. If you decide to start hormone therapy, inquire about the possibility of using the lowest dose for the shortest possible time.



## How much do you know about breast cancer?

### When should I start screenings?

Starting in your 20's or 30's you should have your first clinical breast exam.

### How often should you screen if you don't have symptoms?

Have a clinical breast exam every 3 years before reaching 40 years of age and every year after. Also, have a mammogram every year after age 40.

### When should I start breast self-examinations and how often should I do them?

Start in your 20's, and it's recommended to do them monthly. Report any changes to your doctor.

### What am I looking for during a breast self-exam?

Look for any changes such as swelling, lumps, irritation on the skin, pains, redness, scales, or unusual discharges. Even though most of these changes are not cancer, you should notify your health care professional.

#### Sources:

American Cancer Society: [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

U.S. National Library of Medicine: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001911/>

National Breast Cancer Foundation: <http://www.nationalbreastcancer.org/>

# Quiz: Breast Cancer

1. The American Cancer Society recommends \_\_\_\_\_ minutes of physical activity on five or more days a week to reduce risks.

- a. 15-20
- b. 20-30
- c. 45-60

2. The increased \_\_\_\_\_ levels associated with being overweight are also linked to breast cancer.

- a. Hormone
- b. Insulin
- c. Fat

3. What age should you start screening for breast cancer?

- a. 20's or 30's
- b. 30's or 40's
- c. 40's or 50's

4. How often should you have a mammogram after age 40?

- a. Every year
- b. Every 3 years
- c. Every 5 years

## **Answer Key**

1. C
2. B
3. A
4. A