



Can I Lower My Risk of Breast Cancer?

There is no sure way to prevent breast cancer. But there are things you can do that might lower your risk. Many risk factors are beyond your control (</cancer/breast-cancer/risk-and-prevention/breast-cancer-risk-factors-you-cannot-change.html>), such as being female and getting older. But other risk factors can be changed (</cancer/breast-cancer/risk-and-prevention/lifestyle-related-breast-cancer-risk-factors.html>) and may lower your risk.

For women who are known to be at increased risk for breast cancer, there are additional steps that might reduce the risk of developing breast cancer.

For all women

Get to and stay at a healthy weight: Both increased body weight and weight gain as an adult are linked with a higher risk of breast cancer after menopause. The American Cancer Society recommends you stay at a healthy weight throughout your life and avoid excess weight gain by balancing your food intake with physical activity.

Be physically active: Many studies have shown that moderate to vigorous physical activity is linked with lower breast cancer risk, so it's important to get regular physical activity. The American Cancer Society recommends that adults get at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity activity each week (or a combination of these), preferably spread throughout the week.

Moderate activity is anything that makes you breathe as hard as you do during a brisk walk. It causes a slight increase in heart rate and breathing. You should be able to talk, but not sing during the activity.

Vigorous activities are performed at a higher intensity. They cause an increased heart rate, sweating, and a faster breathing rate. Activities that improve strength and flexibility, such as weight lifting, stretching, or yoga, are also beneficial.

Limit or avoid alcohol: Alcohol (</cancer/cancer-causes/diet-physical-activity/alcohol-use-and-cancer.html>) also increases risk of breast cancer. Even low levels of alcohol intake have been linked with an increase in risk. The American Cancer Society recommends that women who drink have no more than 1 alcoholic drink a day. A drink is 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits (hard liquor).

Is there a link between diet/vitamins and breast cancer risk?

The possible link between diet and breast cancer risk is not clear, but this is an active area of study. A diet that is rich in vegetables, fruit, poultry, fish, and low-fat dairy products has been linked with a lower risk of breast cancer in some studies. But it is not clear if specific vegetables, fruits, or other foods can lower risk. And most studies have not found that lowering fat intake has much of an effect on breast cancer risk.

But this does not mean that there's no point in eating a healthy diet. A diet low in fat, low in processed and red meat, and high in fruits and vegetables can clearly have other health benefits, including lowering the risk of some other cancers.

So far, no study has shown that taking vitamins or other supplements reduces the risk of breast cancer (or any other cancer).

For more on the links between body weight, physical activity, diet, and breast cancer (as well as other cancers), see American Cancer Society Guidelines on Nutrition and Physical Activity for Cancer Prevention (</healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/acs-guidelines-nutrition-physical-activity-cancer-prevention.html>).

Other factors that might lower risk: Women who choose to breastfeed for at least several months may also get an added benefit of reducing their breast cancer risk.

Using hormone therapy after menopause (</cancer/cancer-causes/medical-treatments/menopausal-hormone-replacement-therapy-and-cancer-risk.html>) can *increase* your risk of breast cancer. To avoid this, talk to your health care provider about non-hormonal options to treat menopausal symptoms.

For women at increased risk of breast cancer

If you are a woman at increased risk for breast cancer (for instance, because you have a strong family history of breast cancer, a known gene mutation that increases breast cancer risk, such as in the BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene (</cancer/breast-cancer/understanding-a-breast-cancer-diagnosis/breast-cancer-her2-status.html>), or you have had DCIS (</cancer/breast-cancer/understanding-a-breast-cancer-diagnosis/types-of-breast-cancer/dcis.html>) or LCIS (</cancer/breast-cancer/non-cancerous-breast-conditions/lobular-carcinoma-in-situ.html>)), there are some things you can do to help lower your chances of developing breast cancer.

Your health care provider can help you determine your risk of breast cancer, as well as which, if any, of these options might be right for you.

Medicines to lower breast cancer risk

Prescription medicines can be used to help lower breast cancer risk in certain women at increased risk of breast cancer. (This risk is usually determined with a risk assessment tool known as the **Gail Model** (</cancer/breast-cancer/risk-and-prevention/deciding-whether-to-use-medicine-to-reduce-breast-cancer-risk.html>)).

Medicines such as tamoxifen and raloxifene block the action of estrogen in breast tissue. Tamoxifen can be taken even if you haven't gone through menopause, while raloxifene is only used for women who have gone through menopause. Other drugs, called *aromatase inhibitors*, might also be an option for women past menopause. All of these medicines can also have side effects, so it's important to understand the possible benefits and risks of taking one of them.

To learn more, see:

- [Deciding Whether to Use Medicine to Reduce Breast Cancer Risk \(/cancer/breast-cancer/risk-and-prevention/deciding-whether-to-use-medicine-to-reduce-breast-cancer-risk.html\)](/cancer/breast-cancer/risk-and-prevention/deciding-whether-to-use-medicine-to-reduce-breast-cancer-risk.html)
- [Tamoxifen and Raloxifene for Lowering Breast Cancer Risk \(/cancer/breast-cancer/risk-and-prevention/tamoxifen-and-raloxifene-for-breast-cancer-prevention.html\)](/cancer/breast-cancer/risk-and-prevention/tamoxifen-and-raloxifene-for-breast-cancer-prevention.html)
- [Aromatase Inhibitors for Lowering Breast Cancer Risk \(/cancer/breast-cancer/risk-and-prevention/aromatase-inhibitors-for-lowering-breast-cancer-risk.html\)](/cancer/breast-cancer/risk-and-prevention/aromatase-inhibitors-for-lowering-breast-cancer-risk.html)

Preventive surgery for women with very high breast cancer risk

For the small fraction of women who have a very high risk for breast cancer, surgery to remove the breasts may be an option. Another option might be to remove the ovaries, which are the main source of estrogen in the body. While surgery can lower the risk of breast cancer, it can't eliminate it completely, and it can come with its own side effects. For more on this topic, see [Preventive Surgery to Reduce Breast Cancer Risk \(/cancer/breast-cancer/risk-and-prevention/preventive-surgery-to-reduce-breast-cancer-risk.html\)](/cancer/breast-cancer/risk-and-prevention/preventive-surgery-to-reduce-breast-cancer-risk.html).

Before deciding which, if any, of these options might be right for you, talk with your health care provider to understand your risk of breast cancer and how much any of these approaches might lower this risk.

For women at increased breast cancer risk who don't want to take medicines or have surgery, another option is to have more frequent doctor visits and tests to look for breast cancer. This is sometimes referred to as **close observation**. While this approach doesn't lower breast cancer risk, it might help find it early, when it's likely to be easier to treat.

Written by [References](#)

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