

## Reducing your risk of breast cancer

Breast cancer is deadly: it is the most common type of cancer suffered by women and the second most common cause of female cancer deaths in the U.S. While breast cancer can happen to anyone, there are several things that women can do to reduce the risk of the disease.

- ◆ Talk to your doctor about mammograms. While routine mammograms are generally only recommended for women over the age of 40, doctors sometimes recommend them to younger women who are at greater risk for the disease. These women include those who have certain genetic markers or a strong family history of breast cancer. Cost should never be an issue. Insurers are required to cover mammograms, and programs exist that help uninsured women get the breast cancer screening that they need.
- ◆ Exercise! Researchers have observed a correlation between women who get regular physical activity and lowered breast cancer risk. The amount of exercise required can be as little as 75 minutes a week.
- ◆ Maintain a healthy weight. Being obese or overweight is a risk factor for breast cancer. Talk to your doctor or a registered dietitian about developing a healthy eating plan and reasonable fitness goals.
- ◆ Reduce your alcohol intake. Women who have two or more drinks a day have an increased risk of breast cancer. The American Cancer Society recommends that women limit their alcohol intake to no more than one drink per day.
- ◆ Discuss hormone replacement therapy with your doctor. In 2002, researchers connected hormone therapy with an increased risk of breast cancer. Your doctor can make recommendations based on your symptoms and other risk factors.

Women who have a very high risk of breast cancer may choose more serious preventative measures, such as surgery to remove the breasts and/or ovaries, as well as drug therapy. These options are not suitable for most but may be a lifesaver for women whose genetics place them at strong risk for the disease.

*Dear God, we thank you for the women in our lives. Help us to appreciate the many gifts they give us all. Amen.*

## Breast cancer and family issues

When a woman has breast cancer, she often struggles with multiple issues, including physical recovery, managing treatments, emotional stress and self-esteem. These struggles can also have an impact on the cancer patient's family.

Knowing about these struggles and getting help are important for supporting both the cancer patient and family members. Hospital social workers, advocacy groups and faith communities can all do their part in identifying and providing resources to families in need.

**October Is  
Breast Cancer Month**

Here are some common issues for families where one or more members are undergoing treatment for breast cancer:

**Emotional shock and grief:** Learning of a loved one's diagnosis can be traumatic. Family members may need emotional support as they come to terms with the news that a family member has breast cancer.

Children may find a parent's illness extremely distressing. Mental health professionals, school counselors and parents can work together to ensure that children get the support they need.

**Caretaker support:** When someone is undergoing cancer treatment, she will often rely on family members for caregiving. In some cases, family members may find caregiving to be difficult and perhaps even overwhelming.

Good communication between the patient, caregivers and medical social workers can help address the patient's need for care and the ability of family members to provide it.

**Concern about developing breast cancer:** There is a genetic component to breast cancer. According to the Susan G. Komen Foundation, women who develop breast cancer at a young age are more likely to see another family member also be diagnosed with the disease. Family members should speak to their physicians about genetic testing and address their own risk factors.

**Resources:** [Advocatehealth.com](http://Advocatehealth.com) • Susan G. Komen Foundation: [komen.org](http://komen.org) • National Breast Cancer Foundation: [nationalbreastcancer.org](http://nationalbreastcancer.org) • Metropolitan Chicago Breast Cancer Task Force: [chicagobreastcancer.org](http://chicagobreastcancer.org)