

Breast Cancer Awareness

What You Need to Know to Beat Breast Cancer



Breast cancer symptoms and screening

Some people don't have any signs or symptoms of breast cancer. There are breast changes that can indicate cancer, but they may not be cancer related. If you have any of the symptoms below, don't guess — make an appointment with your healthcare provider.

- New lump in the breast or underarm (armpit).
- Thickening or swelling of part of the breast.
- Irritation or dimpling of breast skin.
- Redness or flaky skin in the nipple area or the breast.
- Pulling in of the nipple or pain in the nipple area.
- Nipple discharge other than breast milk, including blood.
- Any change in the size or the shape of the breast.
- Pain in any area of the breast.

Your own vigilance is the best defense against cancer. This entails three things:

- Making lifestyle changes that may prevent cancer.
- Monitoring your own body for symptoms and signs of cancer.
- Making sure that you are screened regularly by your healthcare provider.



The following are recommendations on lifestyle changes that can lower your risk of breast cancer:

- Try to maintain a healthy weight (maintaining a consistent weight is better for you than a cycle of gaining and losing weight).
- Exercise regularly (at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic exercise each week, preferably spread throughout the week).
- Try to get adequate sleep at night.

- Don't drink alcohol or limit alcoholic drinks to no more than one per day.
- Avoid exposure to chemicals that are known carcinogens (cancer-causing chemicals).
- Limit exposure to any medical imaging tests that use radiation if not medically necessary.
- Ask your healthcare provider about the risks and benefits of hormone replacement therapy or oral contraceptives (birth control pills).
- Ask your healthcare provider about possible benefits of breastfeeding in preventing cancer.
- Don't smoke.

For years, women were urged to do breast self-exams every month. As other tests, like mammograms, have given doctors the ability to detect cancer masses when they are too small to be felt, self-exams are not considered as vital. However, it's good to know your own body, so you can be aware of worrisome changes.

- Consider checking your breasts once a month, 3 to 5 days after your menstrual period ends. If you do find a lump, don't panic. As high as %80 of breast lumps aren't cancerous; they turn out to be harmless cysts or tissue changes related to your menstrual cycle. But you should make an appointment with your healthcare provider if you find something unusual.
- Recommendations for starting regular mammogram screenings (usually every one or two years) vary in different parts of the world. Find out what your healthcare provider recommends.
- If you're diagnosed with breast cancer, the next step will be "staging" the cancer. That's the process of figuring out how big the tumor is and how much of your body it affects. For example, has it spread beyond the breast tissue to nearby lymph nodes?

This is all part of determining whether more tests are needed and what your treatment plan should be. Remember that the American Cancer Society says almost 100 percent of women with stage 1 breast cancer live at least five years, and many women in this group remain cancer-free, which is another reminder that vigilance and early detection are incredibly important in beating breast cancer.