



OCTOBER IS BREAST CANCER —AWARENESS MONTH—

Understanding Breast Cancer Risk Factors

(Family Features)

This year, more than 310,000 women and 2,800 men are estimated to be diagnosed with invasive breast cancer, according to the National Breast Cancer Awareness Foundation. However, advances in early detection and treatment in recent years have increased survival rates to the point where there are currently more than 4 million breast cancer survivors in the United States.

When caught early, the 5-year survival rate is extremely high, which makes preventative measures like screenings and staying informed about risk factors - particularly those that impact you personally - critical elements in prevention and detection. Keep these risk factors in mind to make informed decisions about your health.

Genetic Factors and Family History

Mutations in specific genes, such as BRCA1 and BRCA2, greatly increase the likelihood of the disease. These mutations can be inherited, which means a family history of breast cancer can be a strong indicator of your own risk. If you have a family history of breast cancer, undergo genetic testing and counseling to better understand your risk and take appropriate preventive measures.

Lifestyle Choices

Factors such as diet, physical activity, alcohol consumption and smoking have all been linked to breast cancer risk. Maintaining a healthy weight, engaging in



regular physical activity and limiting alcohol intake can help reduce that risk. Additionally, avoiding smoking and following a balanced diet rich in fruits and vegetables are key preventive measures.

Environmental Exposures

Prolonged exposure to certain chemicals and pollutants including endocrine-disrupting chemicals, such as those found in some plastics and pesticides, have been studied for their potential link to increased risk of developing breast cancer. Being aware of - and minimizing - exposure to harmful environmental agents can be an essential step in reducing

the risk. This includes using safer household products and advocating for cleaner environments.

Age, Gender and Ethnicity

The risk for breast cancer increases with age, and women are at a significantly higher risk than men. However, men can also develop breast cancer, though it's much rarer. Ethnicity also plays a role. For example, white women are more likely to develop breast cancer compared to women of other ethnicities, but African American women are more likely to die from the disease.

Learn more about risk factors and preventative measures you can take at eLivingtoday.com.



Breast cancer terms to know

A recent analysis from the Agency for Research on Cancer and collaborators estimated that 3.2 million new cases of breast cancer will be diagnosed annually across the globe by 2050. That would mark a significant increase in annual cases since 2022, when the World Health Organization reported 2.3 million individuals were diagnosed with breast cancer.

Though breast cancer affects millions of women and their support networks each year, it's not always so easy to understand all of the terminology surrounding the disease. With that in mind, people recently diagnosed with the disease or those who know someone in such a position can learn these common terms to make their journey to recovery a little easier to navigate.

- **Ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS):** Many terms related to breast cancer can be scary, but DCIS is among the more welcoming words a doctor may utter. DCIS is a non-invasive form of breast cancer that doctors may characterize as "stage 0." Breast cancers identified as DCIS are very early stage and highly treatable.

- **Invasive ductal carcinoma (IDC):** Susan G. Komen®, an organization dedicated to raising breast cancer awareness, notes that IDC is a form of the disease that begins in the milk ducts but has spread into surrounding breast tissue and possibly into the lymph nodes or other parts of the body.

- **Lumpectomy:** According to Susan G. Komen®, a lumpectomy is a surgical procedure that removes only the tumor and a small amount of tissue around it. Most of the breast skin and tissue is left in place during a lumpectomy.

- **Mastectomy:** A mastectomy is a surgical removal of the breast. Susan G. Komen® notes there are different types of mastectomy. A modified radical mastectomy removes the breast, the lining of the chest muscles and some of the lymph nodes in the underarm area. This procedure is used to treat early and local advanced breast cancer. A total mastectomy involves surgical removal of the breast but no other tissue or nodes.

- **Hormone receptor status:** Hormone receptor status indicates whether or not a breast cancer requires hormones to grow. Susan G. Komen® notes a significant number of hormone receptors

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Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women worldwide.

When breast cancer is detected early in the localized stage, the five-year relative survival rate is 99 percent.

Source: American Cancer Society

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The different types of mammograms

Mammograms remain the most effective method for diagnosing breast cancer and catching the disease in its earliest, most treatable stages. While various health organizations recommend different screening intervals, the American Cancer Society advises annual mammograms for women ages 40 to 54. Women age 55 and older who adhere to ACS recommendations can switch to a mammogram every two years if in good health.

Mammograms employ low-dose X-rays to map out breasts and detect unusual growths. There are two main types of mammogram: screening and diagnostic.

Screening mammogram

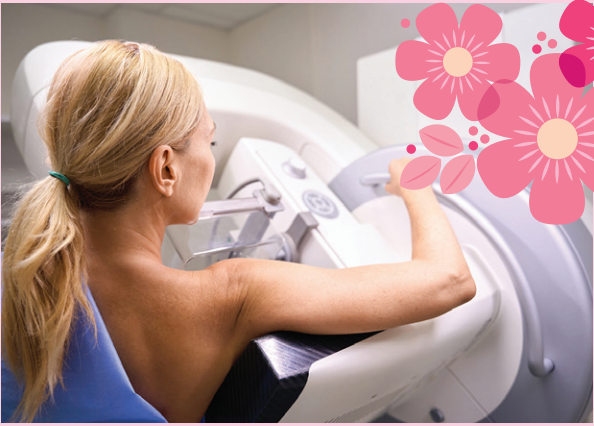
The Breast Cancer Research Foundation says a screening mammogram detects changes in breast tissue that could be indicative of breast cancer in women who exhibit no other symptoms of the disease. Mammograms sometimes can detect breast

cancer up to three years before a person or doctors feel a lump. During the test, the breasts are flattened between two imaging plates from a few angles to get the X-rays.

Diagnostic mammogram

Should a screening mammogram show something amiss or not easily visible the first time around, radiologists may ask the person to come back for additional image testing. This diagnostic mammogram includes additional views. The National Breast Cancer Foundation says diagnostic mammograms take detailed X-rays of the breast using specialized techniques. They also may involve additional views or adjunct testing like ultrasound or MRI to provide a better overall picture of breast health. Diagnostic mammograms may be used to zero in on a specific area of the breast that needs further clarification.

Because a diagnostic mammogram requires taking a greater number of images,



it will expose a patient to a higher dose of radiation. Still, health professionals feel the risk is worth it to help rule out cancer. Also, unlike a screening mammogram that may take several days for a radiologist to read and identify results, a diagnostic mammogram can reveal important information immediately.

Screening and diagnostic mammograms are important tools used to check for breast cancer.

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A look at inherited breast cancer

Individuals can make various changes to their lifestyles to help reduce their chances of developing certain types of cancer, including breast cancer. One thing they cannot change is their genes, prompting curiosity about the role of family history in relation to breast cancer risk.

First-degree connection

Parents pass down many things to their children, including hair color, height, and various other traits. Parents also can pass on an increased risk for breast cancer. Cancer Research UK says some people have a higher risk of developing breast cancer than the general population simply because other members of their families have had cancer. The organization says having a mother, sister or daughter (also referred to as a first-degree relative) diagnosed with breast cancer approximately doubles a woman’s risk for breast cancer. This risk grows even higher when more close relatives have breast cancer, or if a relative developed breast cancer before reaching the age of 50.

Inherited damaged genes

Johns Hopkins Medicine says about 10 percent of breast cancers are related to inheritance of damaged genes. Several genes are associated with elevated breast cancer risk, including BRCA1 and BRCA2. Additional genes associated with an increased risk for breast cancer include PALB2, ATM, CHEK2, CDH1, STK11, PTEN, TP53, and NF1. People who have inherited a damaged gene may have a particularly high



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risk of developing breast cancer or other cancers, depending on the specific gene and their family history.

Getting tested

Johns Hopkins says individuals can be tested for genes that put them at risk for cancer. That is a decision that merits ample consideration, and one that should be carefully discussed with a doctor and family members. Genetic counseling can look for inherited mutations in the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes, the two most notable for increasing breast cancer risk. A blood test is typically covered by insurance companies and analysis can take a couple of weeks. More can be learned about genetic counseling and testing at www.cancer.org.

Whether or not to get genetic testing is a personal decision. However, learning the outcome may help protect future generations. Someone with a genetic mutation has about a 50 percent chance of passing that trait on to

children.

Additional risk factors

Heredity is just one risk factor for breast cancer. The American Cancer Society says White women are slightly more likely to develop breast cancer than some other races and ethnicities. Studies have found that taller women have a higher risk of breast cancer than shorter women, although the reasons for that are not exactly clear. In addition, women with dense breast tissue have a higher risk of breast cancer than women with average breast density. Women who began menstruating early (especially before age 12) have a slightly higher risk of breast cancer. That risk can be attributed to a longer exposure to the hormones estrogen and progesterone. The same can be said for women who experienced menopause later (typically after age 55).

Various factors can increase the risk of developing breast cancer, including genetic markers and family history of the disease.

Simple ways to cut cancer risk

Cancer affects people from all walks of life. According to the World Cancer Research Fund International, there were an estimated 18.1 million cancer cases around the world in 2020, and the breakdown was almost even among men (9.3 million) and women (8.8 million).

Great strides have been made in cancer research in the twenty-first century, and that has led to countless lives being saved. Cancer prevention strategies are another potentially lifesaving tool in the fight against the disease. A significant percentage of cancer deaths could be prevented. In fact, the Prevent Cancer® Foundation reports that research indicates about 50 percent of cancer deaths are preventable with the knowl-



edge individuals have today.

Perhaps the most comforting aspect of cancer prevention is that many of the strategies that can reduce instances of the disease are simple. That means individuals won’t have to go to great lengths to include these strategies in their approach to cancer prevention.

- Avoid tobacco. The link between tobacco use and cancer has been known for a long time, and the good news is the message touting the importance of avoiding tobacco is working. The American Cancer Society reports that cigarette smoking rates had reached historic lows in 2019. While that’s great news, it might not tell the whole story, as consumers now have many other ways to use tobacco, each of which have been linked to cancer. So it’s not simply avoiding cigarettes, but also cigars, hookahs, chewing tobacco, vaping products, and more, that is necessary to reduce cancer risk.
- Shield your skin from the sun. The PCF notes that exposure to the sun’s ultraviolet rays causes the most skin cancers. The WCRFI reports that melanoma of the skin is the thirteenth most common cancer in men and the fifteenth most common cancer in women across the globe. Protecting the skin from the sun is as

simple as applying a sunscreen with a minium sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 and covering up when spending long periods of time in the sun. The PCF urges individuals to avoid tanning beds and protect their skin year-round, including in winter.

- Utilize fruits and vegetables in your fight against cancer. The popularity of plant-based diets is on the rise. In fact, retail sales of plant-based foods in the United States increased by 11 percent in a single year between 2018 and 2019, according to data from the Plant Based Foods Association. A greater reliance on plant-based diets could go a long way toward reducing cancer deaths, as the PCF notes a 2021 study found that three servings of vegetables and two servings of fruit each day reduced the risk of cancer death by 10 percent.
- Avoid excessive alcohol consumption. The PCF notes that alcohol has been linked to cancers of the breast, liver, esophagus, and colon. When consuming alcohol, women are urged to limit their consumption to one drink or fewer each day, while men should limit their consumption to two or fewer alcoholic beverages per day. The science is simple: the more alcohol a person drinks, the greater his or her risk for cancer.



Did you know?

Thanks to early detection and improved therapies, many cases of breast cancer are successfully treated. However, the Susan G. Komen® organization reports breast cancer survival rates vary depending on the stage of the disease at the time of diagnosis. Those diagnosed as having stages 0, I and II tend to have better survival rates than those whose disease was discovered after the cancer had already advanced to stages III and IV. Although each situation is unique, the five-year survival rate among those diagnosed with breast cancer stage I or lower is between 98 and 100 percent. Stage II falls between 90 and 99 percent. The five-year survival rate for stage III patients is between 66 and 98 percent. While the organization does not provide survival data for stage IV, according to the National Cancer Institute’s Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results (SEER), the five-year relative breast cancer survival rates for women with a SEER stage of Distant (the cancer cells have spread to other parts of the body) is 33 percent. If cancer cells have only spread beyond the breast but it is limited to nearby lymph nodes (Regional), the survival rate is 87 percent.

TERMS TO KNOW FROM PAGE B1

on a breast cancer cell indicate it needs the hormone to grow.

- **Family history:** Family history refers to current and past health conditions of a given individual’s biological family members. Family history of breast cancer is considered a risk factor for the disease.
- **Ki-67 Rate:** Susan G. Komen® notes this is a common way to measure proliferation rate. The more cells the Ki-67 antibody attaches to in a given tissue sample, the more likely the tumor cells will grow and divide rapidly.
- **Local treatment:** This refers to treatment that focuses on removing cancer from areas local to the breast, including the breast itself as well as the chest wall and lymph nodes in the underarm area.

These are just a handful of terms that women diagnosed with breast cancer and their family members can learn to better understand the disease and the various ways it’s treated. Additional terminology can be found at komen.org.

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