



Breast Cancer Risk Factors for Females

Modern technology does not provide a way to know for sure if an individual is going to develop breast cancer, but it has allowed us to identify specific risk factors that can increase the likelihood that a woman may develop the disease. Having one or more risk factors does not mean you will develop breast cancer, but it does place you at a higher statistical risk. Additionally, women with no known risk factors may still develop the disease. In fact, experts estimate that over half of all women with breast cancer have no known risk factors.

This magnifies the importance of performing regular self-breast exams and having mammography exams performed at the recommended intervals. Understanding your risk status for the disease is also critical.

A woman's risk factors for breast cancer are one of three types: genetic, hormonal or lifestyle. Risk factors such as age or family history are out of a person's control. However, many risk factors - like smoking or drinking two or more alcoholic drinks a day - are factors a person can control. The risk factors for breast cancer are listed below by type (in alphabetical order):

Genetic Breast Cancer Risks

- **Age** – One's age is the biggest risk factor for developing breast cancer. The older a woman is, the more likely she is to get breast cancer. Women over the age of 50 have a higher risk for developing breast cancer.
- **Benign breast disease** - If a woman has atypical hyperplasia or carcinoma in situ, determined from a breast biopsy, she has a greater chance of having breast cancer.
- **Family history** - If a woman's mother, sister or daughter has had breast cancer, then she is at higher risk for the disease. If both her mother and her sister had breast cancer, the risk is slightly higher. Also, if a woman has a close relative (such as a mother or sister), who had breast cancer in both breasts or had breast cancer before going through menopause, then she is at a higher risk.
- **Other cancers** - A woman is at greater risk for cancer if she or someone in her family has had colon, uterine or ovarian cancer.
- **Personal history** - If a woman has already had breast cancer in one breast, she has a higher risk of getting it in the other breast.
- **Race** - White women are slightly more likely to develop breast cancer than women of other races. But, black women are more likely to die of the disease than women of other races. Hispanic and Asian women have a lower risk of developing breast cancer. A Jewish woman of Ashkenazi heritage has a higher risk for getting breast cancer mainly because of a 1 in 40 chance of having changes in one of the breast cancer genes (BRCA 1 and BRCA 2).



Breast Cancer Risk Factors

- **Genetic alterations** - Changes in genes (like the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes) increase a woman's likelihood of getting breast cancer. These changes are more common in women with a very strong family history of cancers.
- **Previous radiation** - If a woman has been exposed to radiation, particularly during infancy or childhood which involves the breast region, she is at an increased risk for getting breast cancer.

Hormonal Breast Cancer Risks

The following are a few hormonal factors that can raise a woman's risk for getting breast cancer:

- starting menstruation at a very early age (12 years of age and under)
- reaching menopause after 55 years of age
- having a first living child after 30 years of age
- never giving birth to a living child or having few pregnancies
- having used the drug Diethylstilbesterol (DES)
- using hormone replacement therapy over a long period of time (5 or more years)
- starting the use of oral contraceptives at a young age

Lifestyle and Breast Cancer Risks

The following are a few lifestyle issues that can raise a woman's risk for getting breast cancer:

- higher education and socioeconomic status
- getting little or no regular exercise
- regularly having two or more alcoholic drinks a day
- gaining excessive weight after age 18
- being exposed to ionizing radiation
- smoking

Additional information on Breast Cancer Awareness can be obtained at the Overlake Hospital Breast Cancer Awareness Center, the American Cancer Society website and from your physician.

Additional information on PET/CT imaging for breast cancer can be obtained by calling Gary Beneze, PET/CT Program Director at 425-462-4742 or by e-mailing info@washingtonimaging.com