

# BREAST CANCER RISK FACTORS

## Some factors that affect breast cancer risk (in alphabetical order):

- Age (older)
- Age at first childbirth and number of childbirths (older)
- Age at first menstrual period (younger)
- Age at menopause (older)
- Ashkenazi Jewish heritage
- Being born female
- Being overweight or obese
- Birthweight (high)
- Birth control pills (current or recent use)
- Breastfeeding
- Breast density on mammogram (high)
- Drinking alcohol
- Exercise (physical activity)
- Family history of breast cancer
- Height (taller)
- Hyperplasia (benign breast condition)
- Inherited gene mutations (*BRCA1*, *BRCA2* or other high-risk mutations)
- Menopausal hormone therapy (postmenopausal hormone use)
- Personal history of cancer
- Radiation treatment to the chest wall at a young age
- Smoking
- Weight gain

Learn more about breast cancer risk factors at [komen.org](https://www.komen.org).



## Did you know? Everyone has some risk of developing breast cancer. What affects your risk of breast cancer?

Anything linked to an increased (or decreased) chance of getting breast cancer is called a risk factor. However, we don't know the exact causes of breast cancer. No one knows why one person gets breast cancer and another person doesn't.

Breast cancer is complex. It's likely related to a combination of risk factors. Learning about these factors can help you understand your risk of breast cancer.

Some risk factors are out of our control. For example, being born female and getting older are risk factors you can't change. However, there are some risk factors you may be able to control, like leading a healthy lifestyle. Other risk factors are still unknown.

Since you can only control some risk factors, you can't avoid some amount of risk. And most breast cancer risk factors we have some control over are linked to only a small increase or decrease in risk. Because breast cancer is so complex, it's hard to know how a certain set of risk factors will affect any one person.

It's important to remember that just because you have a risk factor doesn't mean that you will get breast cancer. Talk with your doctor about your risk of breast cancer and together develop a breast cancer screening plan that's right for you.

## Make healthy lifestyle choices

The [healthy lifestyle](#) choices listed below are linked to a lower risk of breast cancer.

- Maintain a [healthy weight](#).
- Make [exercise](#) part of your routine.
- Limit [alcohol](#) intake.
- Limit [menopausal hormone therapy](#) (postmenopausal hormone use).
- [Breastfeed](#) if you can.

This fact sheet is intended to be a brief overview. For more information, visit [komen.org](https://www.komen.org) or call the Komen Patient Care Center's Breast Care Helpline at 1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636) Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. ET and Friday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. ET or email at [helpline@komen.org](mailto:helpline@komen.org). Se habla español.

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## Related online resources:

- [Breast Density](#)
- [Questions About Breast Density](#)
- [Breast Self-Awareness Messages](#)
- [Genetics and Breast Cancer](#)
- [How Hormones Affect Breast Cancer Risk](#)
- [Healthy Living and Breast Cancer Risk](#)
- [Risk-Lowering Options for Women at Higher Risk of Breast Cancer](#)
- [Breast Cancer Screening and Follow-Up Tests](#)

## Other resources:

### Breast Cancer Risk Assessment Tool (the Gail Model)

This tool is often used by doctors to estimate breast cancer risk. Although the tool can estimate your risk, it can't tell you whether or not you'll get breast cancer.

### My Family Health History Tool

This tool helps you gather and record your family health history. It organizes health information which can be downloaded and shared with your family members, doctors or a genetic counselor.



## Learn some facts about breast cancer

### FACTS:

1. Risk factors can vary among different [ethnic groups](#).
2. Most women who get breast cancer don't have a [family history](#) of breast cancer.
3. Women who [smoke](#) for many years have an increased risk of breast cancer.
4. Wearing a [bra](#) doesn't cause breast cancer.
5. Using [deodorant](#) isn't related to breast cancer risk

There are many common myths about what causes breast cancer. Visit [komen.org](https://www.komen.org) for safe, accurate and current breast cancer information about risk factors. Share what you learn and help stop the spread of myths that cause worry and concern.

If you or a loved one has questions about [breast cancer risk factors](#), call our Breast Care Helpline at 1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636) or email [helpline@komen.org](mailto:helpline@komen.org). A trained and caring staff member is available to assist you Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. ET.

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