

**Does drinking alcohol increase my chance of getting breast cancer?** Studies show that drinking alcohol increases your risk. The more alcohol you drink, the higher your risk of getting breast cancer. If you drink, have less than one drink a day.

**My breasts feel lumpy and tender at certain times of the month. Does this increase my risk of breast cancer?** Breast lumpiness with tenderness or pain at certain times of the month is common, especially before your period. However, this does not increase your chance of getting breast cancer. Know how your breasts normally look and feel. If you notice any change, see a doctor.

**Does having diabetes increase my risk for breast cancer?**

Women with type 2 diabetes may have an increased risk of breast cancer after menopause. There does not appear to be an increased risk before menopause. The reasons behind possible links between diabetes and breast cancer are not yet well understood and are still under active study.

**I have a family history of breast cancer. Does that mean I'll get breast cancer, too?**

No, it does not mean that you will develop breast cancer too. In fact, most women in the U.S. who get breast cancer do not have a family history of the disease at all. A family history of certain types of cancer can increase your risk of breast cancer. This increased risk may be due to genetic factors, shared lifestyle factors or other family traits. A woman who has a mother, sister or daughter with breast cancer has almost twice the risk of getting breast cancer than a woman without a family history. If more than one of these people had breast cancer, her risk is about 3-4 times higher. In general, the younger the

relative was when she was diagnosed, the greater a woman's chance of getting breast cancer. A history of breast cancer in a close male relative (father, brother or uncle) increases your risk of breast cancer. A history of prostate cancer in a father or brother may also increase a woman's risk of breast cancer, especially if the prostate cancer was found at a young age.

**I know smoking can increase risk for lung cancer but does it increase the risk of breast cancer?**

Smoking increases the risk of many cancers, but its effect on breast cancer is still under study. Although findings on a possible link to breast cancer remain mixed, there is growing evidence smoking may slightly increase the risk of breast cancer. Some studies show smoking long-term and starting early in life (especially before a first pregnancy) may increase risk later in life. Other studies have found no link between these factors and breast cancer risk. For breast cancer survivors, the risks from smoking are clearer. A large study of about 10,000 breast cancer survivors found smoking increased the risk of: breast cancer-specific mortality (death from breast cancer), overall mortality (death from any cause, not necessarily breast cancer), and the more women smoked, the higher these risks.

**Note\*\* This brochure was created using language and guidelines from Komen breast cancer publications and has been modified for use in Montana Tribal communities.**

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ABOUT SUSAN G. KOMEN® Susan G. Komen is the world's largest breast cancer organization, funding more breast cancer research than any other nonprofit while providing real-time help to those facing the disease. Since its founding in 1982, Komen has funded more than \$889 million in research and provided \$1.9 billion in funding to screening, education, treatment and psychosocial support programs serving millions of people in more than 30 countries worldwide. Komen was founded by Nancy G. Brinker, who promised her sister, Susan G. Komen, that she would end the disease that claimed Suzy's life. Visit [komen.org](http://komen.org) or call 1-877 GO KOMEN. Connect with us on Facebook at [facebook.com/susangkomen](https://www.facebook.com/susangkomen) and Twitter @SusanGKomen.

# Be brave, be screened.

## Understanding Breast Cancer

### RISKS AND SCREENING GUIDELINES

# About Breast Cancer

## Why is knowing about breast cancer important?

Keeping our families and communities healthy and informed about breast cancer is important to all of us. Breast cancer is the third leading cause of cancer death among Native American women, and in rare cases, men are also at risk for breast cancer. Knowing your medical history and what is normal for you, getting regular screening and breast exams, and living a healthy lifestyle can all help. There are currently a lot of treatments available, and early diagnosis is critical, so it is important to know the risks and signs, and to share this information with others in your community who may need to know.

## What is breast cancer?

Breast cancer can develop when cells in the breast grow and divide in an abnormal way and then spread into normal breast tissue. The cancer can sometimes also spread to other parts of the body through the lymph system or blood stream. Early detection is very important to keep the cancer from spreading and to get treatment started right away.

## Who's at risk?

- All women are at risk for breast cancer.
- The most common risk factors for breast cancer are **being female and getting older**.
- Most women who get breast cancer have no other known risk factors.
- Although breast cancer is more common in women over the age of 40, younger women can also get breast cancer.

- Men can also get breast cancer, but it is rare. It is about 100 times more common in women.

If you know your risk of breast cancer, you can do things that may reduce your risk.

- You can have screening tests that may find breast cancer early.
- Talk to a doctor right away about any changes you notice in your breasts.
- It's never too late to make healthy lifestyle choices.

## What Can I Do?

- 1) **Know what is normal for you.** Learn how your breasts normally look and feel. The signs of breast cancer differ for all women. If you notice any of these breast changes, see your doctor as soon as possible:
  - Lump, hard knot or thickening inside the breast or underarm area
  - Swelling, warmth, redness or darkening of the breast
  - Change in the size or shape of the breast
  - Dimpling or puckering of the skin
  - Itchy, scaly sore or rash on the nipple
  - Pulling in of your nipple or other parts of the breast
  - Nipple discharge that starts suddenly
  - New pain in one spot that does not go away.

- 2) **Know your risk and talk to your family** about any family medical history of breast cancer. Write this history down so you can share it with your doctor and make sure to include it on medical forms. There are special breast cancer screening guidelines for women with a strong family history of breast or ovarian cancer. Risk factors don't cause cancer, but they can increase the risk.
- 3) **If you have a strong family history**, Komen recommends starting annual mammogram screening five years in age before your first family member was diagnosed. For example: if your sister is diagnosed with cancer at age 38, you should be screened by age 33 Guidelines can vary, so it is always best to talk with your doctor. The National Comprehensive Cancer Network recommends, starting at age 30, you get a:
  - Clinical breast exam every 6-12 months
  - Mammogram every year
  - Breast MRI every year
- 4) **Get screened.** Talk with a doctor about which screening tests are best, based on your risk:

## Mammogram

A mammogram is an X-ray of the breast. Mammography is the best test we have today to find breast cancer early. It can find breast cancer when it is very small and chances for survival are highest. Have a mammogram every year starting at age 40 if you are at average risk, and at age 30 if you have a strong family history.

## Clinical Breast Exam

A clinical breast exam is done by a doctor or nurse in an office or clinic. He or she will look at and feel your breasts and under your arms to look for changes or signs of breast cancer. Sometimes breast cancer can be felt, but not seen on a mammogram. Have a clinical breast exam *at least* every 3 years starting at age 20, and every year starting at age 40. If you have a strong family history, have a breast exam every 6-12 months.

- 5) **Make Healthy Lifestyle Choices.** You can do things that are good for your health and might also lower your risk of getting breast cancer:
  - Maintain a healthy weight.
  - Add physical activity into your routine.
  - Limit alcohol intake.
  - Limit menopausal hormone use.
  - Breastfeed, if you can -- Breastfeeding lowers the risk of breast cancer, especially in premenopausal women.

## Answers to Some Common Questions:

**Do birth control pills increase the risk of breast cancer?** If you are taking birth control pills now, your breast cancer risk is slightly increased. This increased risk becomes less after you stop using them. After about 10 years your risk returns to normal.