

Helping to raise awareness about breast cancer

October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month. About 1 in 8 U.S. women will develop breast cancer over the course of their lifetime.

Our genes, lifestyle and environment work to increase or decrease our risk of getting cancer. Some risk factors can be avoided, some cannot. Breast cancer prevention starts with healthy habits. Act today by getting screened and taking the step to lower your chances of getting breast cancer.

• THINGS THAT MAY LOWER YOUR RISK:

- **Get screened.** Before turning 40, discuss having mammograms with your doctor who will review your family history, lifestyle and other risk factors.
- **Limit your alcohol consumption.** Regular drinking of alcoholic beverages, particularly more than one drink per day, may promote breast cancer development.
- **Maintain a healthy body weight.** Being overweight can increase your risk of many different cancers, including breast, especially after menopause.
- **Eat a healthy diet.** Consider following a Mediterranean diet, which focuses mostly on plant-based foods, whole grains, legumes, healthy fats and nuts. Studies have shown that women who eat a Mediterranean diet have a reduced risk of breast cancer.
- **Get moving.** Women who are physically active for 30 minutes a day have a lower risk of breast cancer. It can also help regulate your hormone levels, improve sleep, reduce stress levels and boost your immune system.
- **Don't smoke or quit if you do.** Smoking increases your risk for many cancers, including breast, and lowers quality of life.

• RISK FACTORS TO BE AWARE OF:

- **Family history.** Having a mother, sister or daughter with breast cancer increases your likelihood of developing the disease by two to three times. Researchers have identified two genes responsible for some cases of hereditary breast cancer: BRCA 1 and BRCA 2. Although about 1 in 200 women carry the genes, having one of them does not guarantee you will develop breast cancer.
- **Age and ethnicity.** Women over 50 are more likely to develop breast cancer. African-Americans are more likely to get breast cancer before menopause.
- **Exposure to estrogen.** Early onset of menstruation, before age 12, and ending menstruation after age 55 may increase risk. Some studies suggest that taking hormone replacement therapy may also increase your risk, especially if taken for more than five years.

The good news is that breast cancer is survivable if found and treated early. Therefore, be vigilant and speak with your doctor if you notice any changes in the breast or underarm areas. Don't delay in getting screened. Also, make sure you spread the word to your family and friends about the importance of mammograms and other cancer screenings.