



BREAST CANCER

# Get the straight facts

**B**efore today ends, as many as 575 women in this country will find out that they have breast cancer.

But as common as breast cancer is, it is also the subject of much misinformation that could keep women from fully protecting themselves against the disease.

What follows is information you can trust about breast cancer.

## Understanding your risk

Roughly one out of every eight women will develop breast cancer at some point in her lifetime, according to the National Cancer Institute (NCI).

Many cases of breast cancer occur in women without obvious risk factors. That's why all women need to be screened regularly for the disease.

Still, some women are more at risk for breast cancer than others, particularly older women. Most cancerous breast tumors develop in women 60 and older, the NCI reports. Your risk also rises if you:

- ▶ Used hormone therapy with estrogen

and progestin for several years after menopause.

- ▶ Have certain breast conditions. Your risk increases if a breast biopsy reveals abnormal breast changes.

- ▶ Have a close relative with breast cancer. Between 20 and 30 percent of women with breast cancer have a family member with the disease, says the American Cancer Society (ACS).

- ▶ Have a genetic predisposition toward breast cancer. Up to 10 percent of breast cancer cases are caused by abnormal genes inherited from a parent, the NCI reports.

**Risky habits** How you live your life also affects your breast cancer risk.

Drinking alcohol, for example, is clearly tied to a heightened risk of breast cancer, the ACS cautions. Women who consume two to five drinks daily have roughly 1½ times the risk of nondrinkers.

Likewise, being physically inactive adds to risk, as does being overweight after menopause. So be sure to watch calories and make time for exercise.

What doesn't influence breast cancer risk is using antiperspirants or wearing underwire bras—despite rumors to the contrary. No study has found a connection to either claim.

## Early detection essential

While breast cancer claims far too many lives, it is not as deadly as women may believe it to be. Consider:

- ▶ Women with breast cancer have a 98 percent five-year survival rate if their cancer has not spread beyond their breast at the time of diagnosis.
- ▶ Every year since 1990, the number of women dying from breast cancer has dropped.

A major reason for this decline is the early detection of breast cancer that mammograms provide. These breast x-rays can spot tumors too tiny for a doctor to feel. This is when treatment is most effective.

Most women 40 and older should have a mammogram every one to two years. Ask your doctor what's best.

And if you notice a lump or change in a breast, let your doctor know right away.



To learn more, visit [New Mexico Breast Center Resources at nmbcr.org](http://New Mexico Breast Center Resources at nmbcr.org).