

## Make Healthy Lifestyle Choices

You can do things that are good for your health that may lower your risk of getting breast cancer.

### 1. Maintain a healthy weight

- Being overweight after menopause increases the risk of breast cancer.
- Weight gain of 20 pounds or more after the age of 18 may increase your risk of breast cancer.
- If you have gained weight, losing weight may lower your risk of breast cancer.



*Leading a healthy lifestyle will not get rid of your risk of serious health problems like cancer, but it may lower your risk.*

### 2. Add exercise to your routine

Physical activity not only burns energy (calories), but may help lower your risk of breast cancer. (This benefit is seen most clearly in women after menopause.)

Exercise fights obesity and may lower estrogen levels. It may also boost the immune system so that it can help kill or slow the growth of cancer cells. Here is all it takes to get started:

- Before you start an exercise program, see a doctor if you:
  - Have been inactive for a long time
  - Are overweight
  - Have a high risk of heart disease
  - Have a high risk of or have other chronic health problems
- Include physical activity in your daily routine. All you need is moderate (where you break a sweat) activity — like brisk walking for 30 minutes a day.

- Do whatever physical activity you enjoy most and gets you moving.
- After exercising, think about how good you feel. Use that feeling to motivate you the next time.

If you are already physically active, keep up the good work.

### 3. Limit alcohol intake

You may have heard about research that showed having a glass of red wine each day reduces your risk of heart disease. While that may be true, many studies have also shown that drinking alcohol increases the risk of breast cancer. The more alcohol you drink, the higher your risk of breast cancer. If you drink alcohol, have less than one drink a day.

#### **4. Limit menopausal hormones**

For each year that combined estrogen plus progestin hormones are taken, the risk of breast cancer goes up. Once they are stopped, in about 5 to 10 years, this increased risk returns to that of a woman who has never used hormones. Menopausal hormones also increase the risk of ovarian cancer and other health problems. Talk to a doctor about the risks and benefits.



*Healthy living is more than keeping your body free of disease.*

#### **5. Breastfeed, if you can**

Breastfeeding protects against breast cancer, especially in premenopausal women.



#### **Let there be no smoke**

If you don't smoke, don't start. Studies of smoking and breast cancer are mixed. However, smoking increases the risk of many types of cancer (including lung, kidney and pancreas).

If you do smoke, there are health benefits of quitting at any age.

#### **Breast Self-Awareness Messages**

1. Know your risk
2. Get screened
3. Know what is normal for you
4. Make healthy lifestyle choices

#### **Emotional health**

- Keep a positive attitude.
- Do things that make you happy and that bring balance to your life.
- Do whatever makes you happy: go to the library, read a book, take a walk in the park or have coffee with a friend.
- Many things can help you be healthier and feel better about yourself. Being in touch with "your spiritual self" through meditation or prayer may help you gain inner peace.

#### **Related fact sheets in this series:**

- Breast Cancer Risk Factors
- Mammography