

# Answers to common questions about breast cancer



Breast cancer is the second-leading cause of cancer death in women. That's why it's so important for all women to get regular checkups and to go for any mammograms and other screenings their doctors prescribe.

Below are answers to frequently asked questions about breast cancer.

## What are the signs and symptoms of breast cancer?

- An abnormality that shows up on a mammogram before physical symptoms develop.
- A lump in the breast.
- A thickening, swelling, distortion or tenderness in the breast.
- Skin irritation or dimpling in the breast.

Breast pain is commonly due to benign conditions and is not usually the first symptom of breast cancer.

## Why are mammograms so important?

If detected early, breast cancer can often be treated effectively with surgery that preserves the breast. The five-year survival rate after treatment for localized breast cancer is 96.3%.

## Are mammograms painful?

Compressing your breasts can cause slight discomfort for a brief period of time. It can help to schedule your mammogram for a week after your menstrual cycle so that your breasts are less tender. Ask your doctor if it is okay to take pain medication an hour before your mammogram.

## Can exercise reduce the risk of breast cancer?

Exercise boosts the immune system and helps you to keep your weight in check. Thirty minutes of moderate exercise per day (for example, a brisk walk) can have a preventive effect.

## Can a healthy diet help prevent breast cancer?

A low-fat diet with plenty of fruits and green and orange vegetables can help reduce the risk of developing breast cancer. A high-fat diet increases the risk because fat triggers estrogen production that can fuel tumor growth.

## Is there a link between birth control and breast cancer?

There is a slightly increased risk of breast cancer for women while they are taking birth control pills and shortly thereafter. If your risk is elevated due to a family history, discuss this with your gynecologist before using hormone-based contraceptives.

## Does menstrual or reproductive history impact breast cancer risk?

Research shows that women who have had more menstrual cycles are at higher risk. So, a woman who began her menstrual cycles before age 12, has not given birth, had her first child at 30 or older, or began menopause after 55 is at a higher risk.

Sources: **Breast Cancer Alliance; National Cancer Institute; American Cancer Society; Susan G. Komen® foundation.**

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