

# Breast cancer: Recommended lifestyle changes



## Risk factors

Like many other cancers, you may have risk factors that are beyond the control of lifestyle changes. For example, if you have a family history of breast cancer or there is a strong indication that you may have inherited mutated BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes, you may be at high risk for getting breast cancer.<sup>1</sup>

The BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes are actually good genes in your body that produce proteins to help stabilize your cell's genetic material. If either of these genes mutate, however, you may actually be at greater risk for breast cancer.<sup>1</sup> These mutations are relatively rare, so discuss this risk factor with your healthcare provider before requesting mutation testing.<sup>1</sup>

## Lifestyle changes to lower your risk

The following are recommendations on lifestyle changes that can lower your risk of breast cancer:<sup>2</sup>

- Try to maintain a healthy weight. This can be done by completing at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic exercise or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity aerobic exercise each week, preferably spread throughout the week.
- Try to get adequate sleep at night
- Don't drink alcohol or limit your intake
- Avoid exposure to chemicals that are known carcinogens
- Limit exposure to any medical imaging tests that use radiation if not medically necessary
- Ask your healthcare provider about the risks and benefits of hormone replacement therapy or oral contraceptives, such as birth control pills
- Ask your healthcare provider about possible benefits of breastfeeding in preventing cancer
- Don't smoke

## Importance of exercise

Let's talk a little more about the role of exercise and maintaining a healthy weight.<sup>3</sup> Women need the hormone known as estrogen. Estrogen is produced naturally, but it can stimulate cell overgrowth and result in a type of breast cancer associated with estrogen production.<sup>3</sup>

Before menopause, your ovaries produce most of your estrogen.<sup>3</sup> After menopause, most of your estrogen comes from fat tissue.<sup>3</sup> So keeping your body fat content down with a combination of healthy eating and exercise reduces the production of estrogen.<sup>3</sup>

Women who are overweight also tend to have higher blood insulin levels. Higher insulin levels have been linked to some cancers, including breast cancer.<sup>3</sup>

The American Heart Association recommends 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise weekly, or 30 minutes of exercise five days a week.<sup>4</sup> If this sounds familiar, it's because this consistency and intensity is also recommended for preventing or managing other diseases, like type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

### Sources:

1. American Cancer Society. Genetic Counseling and Testing for Breast Cancer, December 16, 2021. Available from [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org).
2. Center for Disease Control and Prevention. What Can I Do to Reduce My Risk of Breast Cancer? September 20, 2021. Available from [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).
3. American Cancer Society. Lifestyle-related Breast Cancer Risk Factors, September 19, 2022. Available from [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org).
4. American Heart Association. How Much Physical Activity Do You Need? March 16, 2021. Available from [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org).

---

The information and materials included in MetLife's Health and Wellness Information Library, including all toolkits, modules, template communications, text, charts, graphics and other materials, (collectively, the "Content") are intended to provide general guidance on health and wellness matters and are not, and should not be relied on as, medical advice. While the Content is based on resources that MetLife believes to be well-documented, MetLife is not responsible for the accuracy of the Content, and you rely on the Content at your own risk. Each person's condition and health circumstances are unique, and therefore the Content may not apply to you. The Content is not a substitute for professional medical advice. You should always consult your licensed health care professional for the diagnosis and treatment of any medical condition and before starting or changing your health regimen, including seeking advice regarding what drugs, diet, exercise routines, physical activities or procedures are appropriate for your particular condition and circumstances.