FACT SHEET

Breast Cancer: How to Reduce Your Risk

PhysiciansCommittee for Responsible Medicine

A healthy diet and lifestyle can lower your risk of getting breast cancer.

These four simple tips can boost your health in other ways, too!

1. Choose Plant-Based Foods

Healthy foods from plants (vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and beans) can lower your breast cancer risk in several ways. They are often low in calories and high in fiber. This helps you feel full and lose weight if needed. High-fiber, low-fat diets can also help reduce estrogen levels.[1-4] Lower estrogen levels can lower your risk of breast cancer.[5]

A recent study showed that eating less fat and more fruits, vegetables, and grains could help protect breast cancer survivors, too.[6]

Packed with nutrition, plant-based diets can also reduce the risk of other diseases, like diabetes and heart disease. For the best nutrition, eat a variety of plant foods each day. Be sure to include a good source of vitamin B12, too, such as a supplement. Keep salt intake low, but when you do use salt, choose the iodized kind.

Fill up on veggies.

Not only are they healthy, but some have cancer-fighting nutrients.[7] Try adding broccoli, collard greens, or cabbage to meals.

Eat more soy.

Tofu, soy milk, and edamame may help protect against breast cancer. Studies show that women who eat more soy have a lower risk of breast cancer.[8,9] Soy foods may help protect women who've already had breast cancer, too.[10,11]

Avoid processed meats.

Hot dogs, bacon, sausage, and lunch meats have been linked to a higher risk of breast cancer.[12,13,14] Swap in healthy plant-based protein like beans, tofu, or nuts instead.

2. Exercise Regularly

Being active lowers the risk of breast cancer.[15] Why? It can help with weight loss. Exercise might also make it harder for tumors to grow and even boost your immune system.[16]

If you aren't active, start slow and build up exercise over time. Brisk walking for 10-15 minutes three times per week is a good start. You can then add five minutes until you reach 30-40 minutes. When you feel ready, you can add other activities you like. (Note: Please talk to your doctor before beginning an exercise program.)

3. Limit Alcohol

Drinking alcohol raises breast cancer risk.[17] Alcohol can increase estrogen levels,[18,19] and it can cause DNA damage—the first step in cancer.[19] The less you drink, the lower your risk.[15]

4. Maintain a Healthy Weight

Excess body weight increases the odds of getting breast cancer after menopause.[20,21] Being overweight can also make existing cancer more likely to grow.[22] One reason seems to be that fat cells make extra estrogens—female hormones that can help some breast cancer cells form and spread.[23] Being overweight also raises the risk of other health issues, like high blood pressure.

What's a healthy weight for you? It depends on your height. To find out if you're in the healthy range, you can check your body mass index (BMI).

Find your BMI by entering your height and weight in the BMI calculator at ***PinkLotus.com/PowerUp/Resources/BMICalculator.***

Geraldene's Story

In 1994, Geraldene Wallace got heart-stopping news: She had breast cancer. After getting surgery to remove the lump, she ate plant-based for the next 15 years to reduce the risk of a recurrence. But then she started slipping back into old habits, like eating meat and dairy, and she developed diabetes. A few years later, in 2018, Geraldene was again diagnosed with breast cancer: grade 3, triple-negative, and aggressive. Shortly after her new breast cancer diagnosis, she was hospitalized for diabetes complications. Right there in the hospital, with help from her daughter Jackilyn, Geraldene got back on a healthy vegan diet. Not long after, she had a mastectomy, and just two months later she traveled to Barbados and completed a 5K walk. Now healthy and strong at age 79, Geraldene is off her insulin and has walked several more 5K races.

To learn more, visit LetsBeatBreastCancer.org, or scan the box with your iPhone camera or a QR code reader app.

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5100 Wisconsin Ave., NW, Suite 400 | Washington, DC 20016
202-686-2210 | info@pcrm.org | PhysiciansCommittee.org