



World Cancer  
Research Fund

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# REDUCING YOUR RISK OF BREAST CANCER



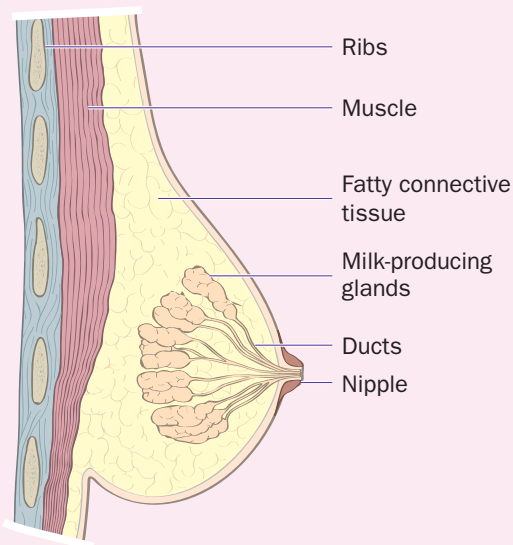
Breast cancer is the most common cancer in the UK. One in eight women develop the disease at some stage in their lifetimes. Breast cancer is rare in men, with around 400 new cases diagnosed each year in the UK, compared to around 50,000 new cases in women.

## What is breast cancer?

Breasts are made up of fatty connective tissue, milk-producing glands, and ducts that carry milk to the nipples. Women develop breast tissue in response to hormones, particularly during puberty, pregnancy and when breastfeeding.

Breast cancers almost always develop in the milk-producing glands or ducts.

As with other cancers, breast cancer develops as a result of damaged cells, which can grow uncontrollably to form a lump or thickening called a tumour.



## What causes breast cancer?

Breast cancer normally develops as a result of a number of factors, which can vary from person to person. Many of the factors that have the greatest influence on our risk of developing the disease are linked to lifestyle choices.

Most breast cancer cases are not hereditary. In fact only three per cent of cases – about 1,500 new cases a year in the UK – are in women who carry a gene that has been linked with the disease. Even if you have inherited one of these genes, making healthy diet and lifestyle choices can still help reduce your risk of developing breast cancer.

## Lifestyle risk factors

Scientists estimate that about two in five cases of breast cancer in the UK – over 20,000 new cases a year – could be prevented by maintaining a healthy weight, being physically active and not drinking alcohol.

The good news is that it's never too late to reduce your risk of developing breast cancer by making small changes to your lifestyle.

## Other risk factors

As well as lifestyle choices, these factors may increase risk:

- ▶ Age – risk increases as we get older
- ▶ Starting your periods at a younger age (before the age of 12)
- ▶ Late menopause (over the age of 55)
- ▶ Not having children, or having a late first pregnancy (over the age of 30)
- ▶ Family history – particularly a close relative who is diagnosed before the age of 50. If you are concerned about this, we recommend you speak to your GP
- ▶ Taking HRT – risk continues to increase slightly the longer you take HRT for but decreases gradually once you stop
- ▶ Taking the contraceptive pill – breast cancer risk increases slightly, but slowly returns to normal after you stop

If any of these factors apply to you, it doesn't mean that you will develop breast cancer, it just means that your risk may be higher than average.

The important thing to remember is that you can make healthy lifestyle choices at any age to help reduce your risk.

## Reducing your risk

Follow these simple steps to reduce your breast cancer risk.

### Cut down on alcohol

There's strong evidence that drinking alcohol increases breast cancer risk. To reduce your risk as much as possible, we recommend not drinking alcohol at all. If you do choose to drink, try to stick to no more than one drink a day and aim to have a few alcohol-free days a week.

- ▶ Find top tips on cutting down: [www.wcrf-uk.org/alcohol](http://www.wcrf-uk.org/alcohol)

### Stay in shape

Being a healthy weight is one of the best things you can do to help protect against breast cancer. Body Mass Index (BMI) and waist circumference are easy ways to check if you are a healthy weight and shape.

- ▶ Calculate your BMI: [www.wcrf-uk.org/bmi](http://www.wcrf-uk.org/bmi)

### Be more active

Being physically active can help reduce your cancer risk but this doesn't have to mean going to the gym. Every type of activity counts, and the more you do the better. Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate activity every day.

- ▶ Find fun ways to get active: [www.wcrf-uk.org/activity](http://www.wcrf-uk.org/activity)

### If you can, breastfeed your baby

Breastfeeding is good for your baby's health and it can also help protect you against breast cancer. It is best for mothers to breastfeed exclusively for up to six months.

- ▶ For information about the benefits of breastfeeding: [www.wcrf-uk.org/breastfeeding](http://www.wcrf-uk.org/breastfeeding)

### And always remember – do not smoke or chew tobacco

## What about cancer survivors?

If you are a breast cancer survivor and you want to reduce the risk of your cancer returning, the best advice to date is to follow the recommendations above where possible.

However, if you have been recently diagnosed or are undergoing cancer treatment it's best to ask an appropriately trained health professional (such as a doctor or dietitian) for advice.

For more information: [www.wcrf-uk.org/survivorship](http://www.wcrf-uk.org/survivorship)

## Being breast aware

If you know how your breasts normally look and feel, then you'll be quick to spot anything unusual.

### How to check your breasts

There's no right or wrong way to check your breasts, just do what feels comfortable for you. Most women check their breasts in the shower, or when they're getting dressed. You may find it easier to check your breasts when you are lying down. Remember to include up to your collarbone and your armpits.

### What changes should you look for?

- ▶ A change in the shape or size of either breast
- ▶ A change in the skin texture, such as puckering or dimpling, or redness or a rash on or around either nipple
- ▶ Discharge from one or both nipples
- ▶ If either nipple becomes inverted (pulled in), or changes shape or position
- ▶ Pain in either breast or armpit, especially if new and constant
- ▶ A new lump, thickening or bumpy area in either breast or armpit. Remember that breasts can be quite lumpy normally, especially just before a period

### Get any changes checked

If you see or feel something you don't think is normal, make an appointment with your GP as soon as you can.

### What about screening?

All women aged 50 and over are eligible to attend a free breast screening. For more information:

[www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/breastscreen](http://www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/breastscreen)



## Find out more

Visit the WCRF UK website for more information and lots of tips and practical advice to reduce your cancer risk by choosing a balanced diet, being physically active and maintaining a healthy weight:

▶ [www.wcrf-uk.org](http://www.wcrf-uk.org)

**Tel: 020 7343 4205**

Healthy, delicious and satisfying recipes suitable for every occasion:

▶ [www.wcrf-uk.org/recipes](http://www.wcrf-uk.org/recipes)

Find out more about the NHS Breast Screening Programme, what happens when you go for a screening and how to get an appointment:

▶ [www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/breastscreen](http://www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/breastscreen)

For more information on the detection and treatment of breast cancer (or other cancers), we recommend contacting Macmillan Cancer Support:

▶ [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

**Tel: 0808 808 0000**



## About WCRF UK

World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF UK) is the charity which focuses on cancer prevention and survivorship through healthy diets, physical activity and body weight. About a third of the most common cancers could be prevented in this way. By raising awareness of this message, we hope that many thousands of lives will be saved.

The education and research programmes of WCRF UK are funded almost entirely by donations from the public. We fund cutting edge cancer research which, in turn, helps people make choices that reduce their chances of developing cancer. We are part of a global network of charities that are committed to preventing cancer.

## Our information on cancer prevention

WCRF UK provides information on cancer prevention and survivorship based on the most comprehensive review of the scientific evidence, led by independent experts. Our advice is kept up to date through our Continuous Update Project (CUP), which reviews and interprets all cancer prevention research on an ongoing basis. The CUP updates the findings of our 2007 Expert Report, *Food, Nutrition, Physical Activity, and the Prevention of Cancer: a Global Perspective*, the most authoritative report of its kind ever published. Our publications are also reviewed by independent experts and are regularly updated.

This leaflet contains information based on:

2009 CUP report on Breast Cancer

2009 Policy Report

2007 Expert Report



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### WCRF UK Recommendations for Cancer Prevention

- 1** Be as lean as possible without becoming underweight
- 2** Be physically active for at least 30 minutes every day
- 3** Avoid sugary drinks. Limit consumption of energy-dense foods (particularly processed foods high in added sugar, or low in fibre, or high in fat)
- 4** Eat more of a variety of vegetables, fruits, wholegrains, and pulses such as beans
- 5** Limit consumption of red meats (such as beef, pork and lamb) and avoid processed meats
- 6** If consumed at all, limit alcoholic drinks to 2 for men and 1 for women a day
- 7** Limit consumption of salty foods and foods processed with salt (sodium)
- 8** Don't use supplements to protect against cancer

### Special Population Recommendations

- 9** It is best for mothers to breastfeed exclusively for up to 6 months and then add other liquids and foods
- 10** After treatment, cancer survivors should follow the Recommendations for Cancer Prevention

*And, always remember – do not smoke or chew tobacco*

WCRF UK is part of the WCRF global network  
For more information about this leaflet please contact us:

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#### **“Stopping cancer before it starts”**

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