

Breast Cancer

Symptoms

Symptoms of breast cancer may vary from woman to woman. Women should be familiar with their breasts so that they know what feels and looks normal for them. Changes should be promptly reported to a health care provider.

Symptoms include:

- lump or mass in your breast
- enlarged lymph nodes in the armpit
- changes in breast size, shape, skin texture or color
- skin redness
- dimpling or puckering
- nipple changes or discharge
- scaliness
- nipple pulling to one side or a change in direction

Having any of these symptoms does not mean you have cancer, but if you notice one or more of them for more than two weeks, see your doctor.

Reducing Your Risk

You can take action to reduce your risk of developing breast cancer. Making the healthy changes below does not mean you will not get breast cancer, but it may lower your chances.

- talk to your doctor about your use of oral contraceptives and hormonal therapy
- maintain your ideal weight
- eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables per day
- follow recommended screening guidelines
- exercise regularly
- eliminate tobacco use and drink alcohol in moderation
- get your breast cancer risk assessed

If you're at increased risk, talk to your doctor about medications that can reduce your risk of developing breast cancer.



Swimming has been Laurine Schuler's favorite activity since childhood, so naturally she got back in the pool after surgery for breast cancer more than a decade ago. Since then, she set records in Senior Olympic and Masters' swim competitions.

Risk Factors

Many factors may influence the development of breast cancer, including:

- **age** Most cases occur in women 50 or older; it is less common in women 35 or younger. Age is the most influential risk factor.
- **family history** Your risk is higher with a family history (especially mother, sister, daughter) of breast and/or ovarian cancer.
- **hormones / childbirth** Your risk is higher if you had your first period before age 12, began menopause after age 55, never had children or had your first child after age 30. Postmenopausal use of hormone therapy increases your risk of developing breast cancer.
- **previous biopsy** If you've had abnormal breast biopsy results or benign breast diseases requiring biopsies, you may be at increased risk. Other breast diseases, such as atypical hyperplasia, lobular or ductal carcinoma in situ, are risk factors, too.
- **education / socioeconomic status** Women with a higher socioeconomic status and/or education tend to have fewer children and start childbearing after age 30 – both of which put them at higher risk.
- **weight** Obesity or weight gain after menopause are risk factors.
- **genetic alterations** Mutations in the BRCA1 and/or BRCA2 genes account for about five to 10 percent of all breast cancer cases.

Other risk factors include:

- oral contraceptive use
- a diet high in saturated fats
- physical inactivity
- alcohol (more than one alcoholic drink a day)

The Best of Breast Health

Know Your Risks

MD Anderson has specific cancer screening schedules for women, based on their chances of getting cancer. The exam you get and how often you are tested depends on whether you are at average or increased risk for cancer.

People at increased risk have a higher chance of getting cancer than women at average risk. Those at increased risk may need to get additional tests, start screening at an earlier age or have exams more frequently.

It's important to know if people in your family have had cancer. This information, along with your personal health history, helps your doctor find out if you're at increased risk. You and your doctor can use this information to make a well-informed decision about cancer screening.

MD Anderson's screening guidelines for women at average risk for breast cancer are listed below. For MD Anderson screening guidelines for women at increased, visit www.mdanderson.org/screeningguidelines.

Screening

Cancer screening exams are medical tests performed when a person has no symptoms.

The screening guidelines below are for women at average risk for breast cancer. Women at average risk have not had breast cancer or radiation treatment to the chest. They also do not have a family history (mother, sister, daughter) of breast cancer and have not tested positive for the breast cancer gene.

Age 20 to 39, you should:

- Have a clinical breast exam every 1 to 3 years
- Practice breast awareness*

Age 40 and older, you should:

- Have a clinical breast exam every year
- Get a mammogram every year
- Practice breast awareness*

**All women should be familiar with their breasts so that they will notice any changes and report them to their doctor without delay.*

Tips

- Schedule a clinical breast exam at the time of, or just before, your regularly scheduled mammogram.
- If you are age 35 or older, ask your doctor to calculate your breast cancer risk using the Gail Model.

These screening guidelines apply to women who are expected to live for at least another 10 years. The guidelines are not for women who have a health condition that would make it hard for a doctor to treat breast cancer.



Barbara Roberts detected a lump in her breast more than five years ago. She enjoys spending time with her daughter, gardening, bike riding, reading and listening to music. She's a good cook, too.

MD Anderson Resources

The Cancer Prevention Center can help you understand your risk of developing cancer through risk assessment and, when appropriate, genetic testing. The center offers personalized risk-reduction strategies, including healthy lifestyle recommendations and the use of medications to reduce cancer risk. Specialists perform risk-based cancer screening exams based on age, gender and cancer risk factors.

MD Anderson provides cancer care services at five convenient locations in the greater Houston area: Bay Area, Katy, Texas Medical Center, Sugar Land and The Woodlands.

For more information about MD Anderson programs or services, or to make an appointment, contact askMDAnderson at 1-877-632-6789 and ask for Carla, or visit www.mdanderson.org/ask.

Want to learn how you can prevent cancer?

Get a personalized action plan by completing MD Anderson's Cancer Risk Check at www.mdanderson.org/riskcheck.