

# Breast Cancer Awareness Month



## Lower Your Risk

Researchers are working to learn how our “external” and “internal” environments may work separately and together to affect our health and possibly the risk of developing breast cancer. “Internal environment” means the things inside our bodies that influence our health, such as genetics, hormones, illnesses, and feelings and thoughts. “External environment” refers to the things outside of our bodies that influence our health, such as air, water, food, danger, music, noise, people, and stress. Also, the external environment enters our internal environment every day—think of the food you eat, water you drink, air you breathe and medicines you take. More subtly, there’s the way you “breathe in” or absorb your environment, such as your home or workplace, and the way you take in energy from the people you spend time with.

Some of these factors, such as your genetic makeup and the medicines that you take, have a very direct effect on your breast health. The impact of other, indirect factors, such as air quality, exercise, meditation, and spending time with friends, is less understood.

You can control some risk factors. If you are overweight, you may seek to lose excess pounds. You can also make informed choices about medicines you take. But other factors are beyond your control. For instance, you can't change your gender. Women are much more likely than men to have breast cancer. This is mostly because women have more estrogen and progesterone in their bodies. These hormones stimulate breast cell growth—both normal and abnormal.

Risk reduction means making choices to avoid or minimize any possible risk factors that you can. It also means increasing protective factors in your life to lower chances of developing breast cancer.

Although you can control certain risk factors, remember that doing so does not guarantee zero risk. It is also important to keep in mind that many women who have a particular risk factor for breast cancer never develop it.

## Possible Link Between Physical Activity & Breast Cancer Survival

According to the results of a study published in the journal *Cancer*, higher levels of physical activity in the year prior to breast cancer diagnosis may result in better breast cancer

**“I have many people with breast cancer in my fitness classes who are back to 100 percent plus more, because their appreciation for life is heightened, and their lifestyle approach is enhanced and exemplary. These people are living life better than other friends who haven't been challenged by breast cancer.”**

**—Ronda Gates,  
hospital pharmacist  
and nutrition  
counselor**

survival, particularly among overweight women.

A possible benefit of physical activity was reported by a study published in 2005; women in this study who engaged in physical activity equivalent to walking for one hour per week experienced a reduced risk of death from breast cancer compared to women who engaged in less activity. The largest survival benefit was demonstrated in women who walked 2-3 miles per hour for one hour, three times per week.

Studies have been conducted testing this theory with supportive results. There was a significant link between physical activity in the year before diagnosis and breast cancer survival among women with

the highest body mass index (BMI): Among women with a BMI of 25 or higher, those with the highest levels of physical activity had 30% lower risk of death than those with the lowest levels of physical activity. Among women with a lower BMI, there was no link between physical activity and breast cancer survival.

The researchers conclude that physical activity in the year before breast cancer diagnosis may result in better breast cancer survival, particularly among women who are overweight near the time of diagnosis.

Source: Susan G. Komen Website

