



**ASHU SHAH**  
**CANCER FOUNDATION**



## **BREAST CANCER & ITS PREVENTION**



[www.ashushahcancerfoundation.org](http://www.ashushahcancerfoundation.org)



# KEY MESSAGE ON CANCER , BEAST CANCER & ITS PREVENTION

— FROM —



**DR. Ashu Shah**

**Doctor, Entrepreneur & Philanthropist  
Managing Director Asian Health Care  
Founder ASC Foundation**

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## **WHY EARLY DETECTION OF BREAST CANCER**

Breast cancer is a major silent killer of women. Every year, around 21 lakh women around the world are diagnosed with breast cancer. In India, breast cancer accounts for 27% of all cancers detected in women. <sup>1</sup> It is also one of the leading causes of death among women; according to WHO data, 627,000 women died of breast cancer in 2018. Globally, it accounts for nearly 2.1 MILLION each year and also causes the greatest number of cancer-related deaths among women. Breast cancer can be contained and even treated successfully, only if it is detected in time.

In many cases, it has been seen that there is a late manifestation of the symptoms. As a result, a lot of women are diagnosed at a much later stage. As we all know, late detection makes it exponentially difficult to treat cancer. It also significantly reduces the survival rate. As a society, we, therefore, need to singularly prioritize early detection of breast cancer among women around us.

# SELF EXAMINATION OF THE BREAST IS THE BEST INVESTIGATIVE TOOL TO PREVENT BREAST CANCERS.



## **SYMPTOMS OF BREAST CANCER ARE :**

- a new lump or mass inside the breast
- swelling in the part of the breast, or the whole breast
- heaviness in the breast
- dimpled skin that may resemble orange peel
- an open wound or lesion that develops spontaneously
- nipple or breast pain
- inverted nipples
- flaky, dry, red, or thickened skin
- nipple discharge that is not the result of lactation
- swollen lymph nodes in the armpits or around the collarbone

Despite the difference in prevalence, the symptoms of breast cancer tend to be similar in all people. This is because the biological makeup of breast tissue does not vary much between the sexes. Additionally, it is possible for a person of any sex to inherit genetic mutations that increase the risk of breast cancer in males and females to varying degrees. Examples include the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes.



## **HOW CAN WE ENSURE EARLY DETECTION?**

While breast cancer is a condition that can be managed and detected well with an early diagnosis, what's also causing an unfortunate rise, apart from genetic risk, is the changing environment and the increasingly changing lifestyle. Late pregnancies, obesity, pollution, incorrect diet, and hormonal changes are some of the reasons behind the rise in cases. Like other forms of cancers, while breast cancer can strike any time, there are also some risk factors and lifestyle changes that may put one at a seemingly higher risk, and hence, must be prevented from the root for healthier living. So this Breast Cancer Awareness month, here are some factors and causes which put you at risk, and the ones you should work to prevent and avoid at all costs:

### **INCREASING WEIGHT**

Obesity is one of the biggest health problems affecting people globally. While an increase in weight does pose problems for the waistline, cholesterol and increases the risk of vascular diseases, it has also been seen that obesity is one of the factors which can increase an individual's risk of developing breast cancer. Breast cancer is also a condition that worsens when one is overweight after menopause.

When there's a higher disposition of fat cells in the body, the more estrogen you make, which can cause some of the cancerous cells to grow and cause trouble. Obesity has also been linked to higher insulin levels, which can also cause diabetes and other hormonal disruptions. Thus, whatever age you are, it's crucial to maintain weight and prevent any weight gain. Work with a dietician to make dietary modifications, exercise, and move around to fight off excess fat. Remember, the more weight you lose, the less your risk of developing breast cancer, especially after the age of 45.



## **DIETARY CHANGES**

Diet is also one important factor to check one's cancer risk. It has been said that consuming high-fat diets, which not only contribute to one's obesity risk, also is a big risk factor that determines breast cancer risk. Unmoderated, or poor dietary choices can lead to the development of fat cells in the body, which can increase estrogen levels. As such, it's important to limit or minimize the consumption of junk, processed foods, alcohol, meats, added sugar, and refined carbs.

## **ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION**

It's important to curb alcohol and tobacco usage and keep it to the bare minimum. Studies have highlighted that the risk of breast cancer increases with higher alcohol consumption. As per estimates, women who tend to drink more than 1 alcoholic drink a day have a 7-10% higher risk of cancer than non-drinking women, and the percentile risk further goes up with the more drinks one may habitually consume. Not to forget, alcohol consumption is a habit tied to multiple other risk factors, including liver damage, addictions, poor mental health, heart disease, high blood pressure, and cholesterol issues.

While for starters it's important to not let your drinking habits turn into a chronic habit, people who drink frequently should first work towards cutting down their consumption and have no more than one drink per day. As a precautionary habit, be mindful and aware of how much alcohol you do take in with every drink.



## **REPRODUCTIVE HISTORY**

While having a child, or getting pregnant at any age is a personal choice that lies with women, experts do say that late pregnancies, as well as a higher percentile of women tending to have no kids, are at a higher risk of getting breast cancer. With later or no pregnancies, the breast tissue gets exposed to a higher volume of estrogen over time, which can certainly increase one's risk, especially if there are also other risk factors at play. In contrast, the risk of breast cancer may go down amongst women who tend to get pregnant before or around the age of 30 and those who have a higher number of births.

What may also impact breast cancer risk is choosing not to breastfeed. As per multiple studies, reduced risk of breast cancer is one of the 'benefits of breastfeeding infants for upwards of a year. Thus, it's important to ascertain one's risk and go for preemptive screenings and discussions with professional doctors, with respect to reproductive history.

## **EARLY MENSTRUATION AND LATE MENOPAUSE**

Similar to reproductive history, experts also say that women who may get their periods early (start menstruating before the age of 12), or reach menopause much later also have a higher exposure factor to estrogen, which can affect breast tissues. Women facing such risks are asked to go for more frequent screenings and be informed about their breast cancer risks.



## **BREAST DENSITY**

Those who have dense breasts, tend to have more fibrous tissues and less fat deposition in their breasts, which can also increase chances of developing breast cancer. Doctors also say that dense breasts can make it difficult to detect or visualize cancerous cells in the breasts when mammograms are taken or may require other forms of imaging techniques.

Apart from this, certain types of cellular abnormalities or noncancerous breast conditions (benign issues) can also increase one's incidental risk of developing breast cancer. However, it's also important to remember that this can be a non-controllable form of risk factor. Getting breast implants is another factor, which has been previously tied to a higher risk of cancerous growth.

## **USING SOME FORMS OF BIRTH CONTROL**

Hormonal changes and disruptions are an often-linked cause of some forms of cancer, including breast cancer. Using birth control, particularly the kinds which may include higher hormonal use (such as oral contraceptives, implants, IUDs, vaginal rings) can increase the risk or likelihood of diagnosing breast cancer. Studies have also mentioned that women who may choose to go for hormonal therapy after menopause are also at a higher than general risk.



## **WHO ARE AT RISK?**

It has been estimated that 1 in every 28 women is likely to develop breast cancer during her lifetime. Women in the 30 to 50 age group are more prone. It is highly recommended that women older than 21 years should start screening tests as a precaution. Younger women can do a self-breast examination regularly, while those over the age of 30 years should get examined by a doctor (Medical oncologist )once a month. Also, regular mammography ought to be done once one reaches the age of 40.

Our focus should be on creating awareness among young females, as well as males let go of existing taboos around discussing breast cancer and ensure that women in our families and those around us start screening tests at an early age.



## **EAT FIVE ESSENTIAL FOODS TO PROMOTE BREAST HEALTH :**

1. Berries: They are rich in antioxidants, which have been shown to protect against the development and spread of cancer cells.

2 Salmon: Fatty fish, like salmon, is high in omega-3 fats, selenium, and antioxidants that may protect against cancer.

3. Broccoli: Cruciferous vegetables, including broccoli, contain glucosinolate compounds, which have high anticancer capabilities.

4 Beans and lentils: Both are full of fibre, which may protect against breast cancer.



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## HOW TO **REDUCE** THE **RISK OF** **BREAST CANCER?**



**Giving birth at  
younger age ( $\leq 30$  years)**



**Breastfeeding**



**Having  
children**



**Stop/Avoid hormonal  
birth control pill**



**Avoiding hormone  
replacement therapy to  
treat menopausal symptoms**



**Regular  
exercise**



**Limiting alcohol or  
avoid alcohol**



**Maintaining  
healthy weight**