

# Breast Cancer and You: What You Need to Know

## What is breast cancer?

Cancer is a disease in which cells in the body grow out of control. When cancer starts in the breast, it is called breast cancer. The breast is made up of three main parts: glands, ducts, and connective tissue.

Sometimes breast cells become abnormal and grow faster than normal cells. These extra cells form a mass called a tumor. Some tumors are “benign,” or not cancerous. Other tumors are “malignant,” meaning they are cancerous and have the ability to spread to other parts of the breast and body and disrupt normal functions in those areas.

## Who gets breast cancer?

All women are at risk for breast cancer. Men can also get breast cancer, but this is rare. Not counting skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common cancer in women of all combined major racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Among Hispanic women, it is the most common cause of death from cancer, and it is the second most common cause of death from cancer among white, black, Asian or Pacific Islander, and American Indian or Alaska Native women. In 2006, (the most recent year for which statistics are available), 191,410 women were diagnosed with breast cancer, and 40,820 women died from the disease.<sup>†</sup> Although more white women get breast cancer, more black women die from it.

<sup>†</sup> U.S. Cancer Statistics Working Group. *United States Cancer Statistics: 1999–2006 Incidence and Mortality Web-based Report*. Atlanta (GA): Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and National Cancer Institute; 2010.

## How can I prevent it?

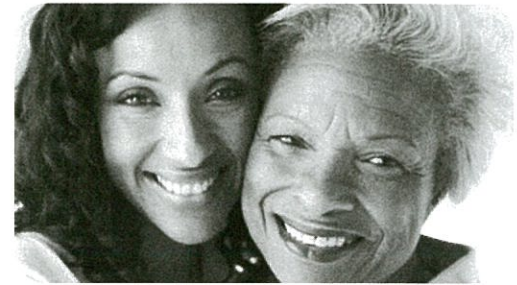
Scientists are studying how best to prevent breast cancer. Ways to help lower your risk of getting breast cancer include—

- Stay physically active by getting regular exercise.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Avoid using hormone replacement therapy (HRT), or find out the risks and benefits of HRT and if it is right for you.
- Limit the amount of alcohol that you drink.

## What raises a woman's chance of getting breast cancer?

Several factors may affect your risk of developing breast cancer, including—

- Getting older.
- Not having children, or having your first child later in life.
- Starting your first menstrual period at an early age.
- Beginning menopause at a late age.
- Having a personal history of breast cancer or certain benign breast diseases, such as atypical ductal hyperplasia.
- Having close family relatives (such as a mother, sister, father, or daughter) who have had breast cancer.
- Having a genetic condition, such as certain mutations in your BRCA1 or BRCA2 genes.
- Having been treated with radiation therapy to the breast or chest.
- Being overweight, particularly after menopause.
- Using hormone replacement therapy for a long time.
- Using oral contraceptives.
- Drinking alcohol.
- Being physically inactive.



## What are the symptoms?

When breast cancer starts out, it is too small to feel and does not cause signs and symptoms. As it grows, however, breast cancer can cause changes in how the breast looks or feels. Symptoms may include—

- A new lump in the breast.
- A lump that has changed.
- A change in the size or shape of the breast.
- Pain in the breast or nipple that does not go away.
- Flaky, red, or swollen skin anywhere on the breast.
- A nipple that is very tender or that suddenly turns inward.
- Blood or any other type of fluid coming from the nipple that is not milk when nursing a baby.

If you have any of these symptoms, talk to a health care professional. They may be caused by something other than cancer, but the only way to know is to see a health care professional.

