

# Health eNews



## How You Can Help in the Fight Against Breast Cancer

### Learn one simple way you can help fight this epidemic problem.

There are many ways to help in the fight against breast cancer, here are a few:

- **Join the Breast Cancer 3-Day.** Sponsored by the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, participants walk 60 miles in three days to help raise millions of dollars for breast cancer research and patient support programs.
- **Enter the Komen Race for the Cure.** This is a series of 5K runs/fitness walks throughout the country that raises money and awareness for the fight against breast cancer. It also celebrates breast cancer survivorship and honors those who have died from the disease.
- **Buy breast cancer postage stamps.** The breast cancer research stamp costs a few cents more than a regular stamp and can be used as first class postage within the United States. After the cost of a first-class stamp is deducted, the remaining cents go to breast cancer research. By asking for breast cancer research stamps at your local post office instead of ordinary postage, you will be helping scientists and researchers in their work to identify a cause and cure for this dreaded disease.
- **Donate.** The American Cancer Society (ACS) is one good example. If you want to donate money, be sure that the organization is legitimate. Ask your doctor about any organizations you are considering. Many companies offer matching gift programs to encourage employees to contribute to charitable organizations. Check with your employer. If one isn't established, ask about setting one up. You may be able to donate cars, trucks and other vehicles, which are sold in order to raise money for cancer research.
- **Enter the Relay For Life.** This is an overnight event sponsored by ACS. It celebrates survivors and their loved ones and raises money for research. Teams gather at schools, fairgrounds or parks and take turns walking or running laps. Each team tries to keep at least one team member on the track at all times.

## Calculating Breast Cancer Risk

### Many women overestimate their risk for breast cancer. A tool can help women understand their true risk for breast cancer.

Breast cancer is the second leading type of cancer in women, surpassed only by lung cancer. A woman is at risk for breast cancer just because she's a woman. However, doctors have a tool that can help predict how great her risk really is of developing invasive breast cancer.

Researchers from the National Surgical Adjuvant Breast and Bowel Project (NSABP) in Pittsburgh have developed a breast cancer risk assessment tool that estimates risk based on a series of factors including current age, age at first menstruation, age at delivery of first child, number of previous breast biopsies and number of first-degree relatives with breast cancer. The tool can determine a woman's risk of cancer throughout her lifetime.

A positive response to any of the questions (except age) equals an elevated risk of breast cancer. Then the model calculates how many times higher a woman's risk is compared to women in the general population with no risk factors. The results can either help alleviate a woman's fears, or if it indicates a risk, allow doctor and patient to move forward with preventative strategies and treatment.



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Many women greatly overestimate their breast cancer risk. So finding out their true risk often reduces their anxiety.

If a woman finds out she is at high risk for breast cancer, there are steps she can take to greatly reduce her risk. Options include:

- Surgical removal of a healthy breast (prophylactic mastectomy)
- Taking the drug tamoxifen for five years, which studies have shown can reduce the incidence of breast cancer by 45 percent in women considered at high risk

Ask your doctor about using this tool to assess your breast cancer risk. It's available from the National Cancer Institute (NCI). Your doctor may have the tool, or you can get it by calling (800) 4-CANCER -- 1-800-422-6237 or requesting it from the NCI Web site. NCI recommends women go over their results with a doctor.

## Breast Cancer: Coping with the Fear

**If there's breast cancer in your family or someone close has been diagnosed, are you afraid you're next? Control your fears through lifestyle changes.**

For many women, breast cancer is one of their worst fears. There's no doubt that it is a scary disease. But most women overestimate their risk of getting breast cancer. Experts say that women alive now have about a 13 percent risk of getting breast cancer at some time in their lives. Here are some things that may help put the risk in context:

- This is a woman's lifetime risk, meaning it's spread throughout your life. Most cases of breast cancer occur in women older than 60.
- Another way to state this is that about one out of eight women will get breast cancer sometime during her life. That means that seven out of eight women won't ever get breast cancer.
- About 41,000 women die each year of breast cancer. More than 330,000 women die each year of heart disease.

These numbers only give a general idea of breast cancer risk. Your personal risk will depend on many factors. The key to coping with a fear of breast cancer is knowing what puts you at risk and then taking steps to lower your risk.

### Understand your risks

Just being a woman puts you at risk for breast cancer. (Men can get it, too, but it's rare.) Some things that put you at risk are not in your control. These include:

- Age. The risk of breast cancer increases as you get older.
- A family history of breast cancer, especially in a mother, sister or daughter.
- A personal history of breast cancer. Having it in one breast means you're more likely to get it in the other breast.
- Starting your period before age 12 or going through menopause after age 55.
- Having dense breasts. Your doctor can tell you if your breasts are dense.

You may be able to control some things that increase your risk for breast cancer. Things that increase your risk include:

- Not having children or having your first child after age 30.
- Taking hormones after menopause.
- Being overweight after menopause.



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- Not being physically active.
- Drinking alcohol. The more you drink, the higher your risk.

## Take steps to lower your risk

There's no way to guarantee that you won't get breast cancer. But certain health practices have been shown to lower the risk of cancer. You don't have to be perfect. Even making a few of these changes could help reduce your breast cancer risk.

- Don't smoke. This is the number one thing you can do to improve your health and lower your cancer risk.
- Stay at a healthy weight for your height. Try to avoid weight gain, especially around your waist.
- Get 30 minutes of physical activity every day. Walking, swimming and riding a bike are good choices. But housework, yard work and gardening count, too. Just try to move more. But always check with your doctor before you increase your activity level.
- Make healthy food choices. Eat plenty of high-fiber, plant-based foods such as whole grains, beans, fruits and vegetables. Limit red meat, saturated fat and salt.
- If you drink, limit alcohol to no more than one drink a day.
- Get regular breast exams. Your doctor can tell you how often you need one. Get a mammogram regularly starting at age 40 (or sooner if you're at high risk).

If you're at high risk for breast cancer, talk to your doctor about your choices. You may be able to take medicines or have surgery to lower your breast cancer risk. Your doctor can help you decide if genetic testing is right for you.

## Mammograms Remain Best Way to Spot Breast Cancer

Mammograms detect 80 to 90 percent of breast cancers in women without symptoms, and all women 40 and older should get a yearly mammogram, says the American Cancer Society (ACS) as it marks National Mammography Day on Friday, Oct. 17.

'Mammography remains the most effective screening test for the early detection of breast cancer available to women today,' Dr. Otis W. Brawley, the ACS's chief medical officer, said in a society news release. 'Women are strongly urged to schedule their mammograms yearly and to talk to their doctor regularly about their risk for breast cancer.'

Early detection by mammography screening and improvements in treatment have contributed to a decline in the breast cancer death rate in the United States since 1990. However, recent evidence suggests that many women are getting mammograms at a later age, not scheduling them yearly, or aren't receiving appropriate and timely follow-up after positive breast cancer screening results.

Along with recommending yearly mammograms and clinical breast examinations for women over age 40, the ACS says that women ages 20 to 39 should undergo clinical breast examination at least once every three years. All women should be familiar with their breasts and immediately report any changes to their health care provider.

Women at high risk for breast cancer (greater than a 20 percent lifetime risk) should have an annual MRI and mammogram, and women at moderate risk (15 percent to 20 percent lifetime risk) should talk with their doctors about the benefits and limitations of adding MRI screening to their yearly mammogram, the ACS recommends.

### More information



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Women can access a free online 'mammogram reminder tool' at the American Cancer Society, [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org).

## Keeping Your Eyes Healthy

Vision problems and eye conditions can affect people of all ages. That's why it's so important to take care of your eyes—starting early in life. The following tips can help you keep them safe and healthy:

- **Don't smoke.** This dangerous habit deprives your body of nutrients that are essential in preventing certain eye diseases. If you smoke and need help quitting, talk with your doctor.
- **Enjoy your fruits and veggies.** Eat at least three to five servings of fruits and vegetables every day. In particular, leafy green vegetables such as spinach and kale may benefit your eyes. These foods contain lutein—an antioxidant. This may reduce your risk of some eye conditions.
- **Wear sunglasses.** Exposing your eyes to too much sunlight may lead to cataracts. Make sure your sunglasses block out UVA and UVB rays. And, wear them every time you go outside—even on cloudy or overcast days.
- **Protect against injury.** Certain sports, jobs and activities put your eyes at risk for injury or irritation. Wear appropriate eye gear to help keep them safe.
- **Practice good hygiene.** Avoid touching your eyes. This can help prevent the spread of infections such as pinkeye. Also, don't share eye drops, makeup or contact lens supplies with others.
- **Take care of your contacts.** If you wear contact lenses, be sure to keep them clean. Wash your hands before inserting or removing them. Don't exceed recommended time limits for wearing your lenses. And, remove them if you feel pain.

## Eye Exams

Getting your eyes checked is one of the best ways to help them stay healthy. Your eye care specialist can detect and treat diseases. He or she also can correct any vision changes you've experienced. How often you should have an exam depends on factors such as age, health, and your risk of developing eye diseases.

The American Academy of Ophthalmology and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend that all children receive vision screening during regular well child visits and vision testing starting at about age 3 years. Talk with your eye doctor about your child's specific needs, especially if you have family history of vision problems or if your child is showing symptoms such as lazy eye, crossed eyes or drooping of the upper eyelid. Periodic eye examinations are recommended for all people over age 18. People over age 65, people with diabetes and those at risk for eye disease may need more frequent evaluations. If you have symptoms such as blurred vision, or risk factors for eye problems, ask your doctor how often you should have eye exams.

Remember, if you have sudden pain, sensitivity, discomfort, redness or blurred or decreased vision, see your doctor or eye care specialist right away.

## Eye Safety Begins at Home

### Half of vision injuries occur there, experts warn

Half of all eye injuries in the United States occur at home but are preventable, according to experts at the nonprofit group Prevent Blindness America.



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From cleaning products to coat hangers, the average American home is rife with the potential for painful, blinding accidents. Americans can take simple steps, such as wearing appropriate eye protection, to protect their sight, however.

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, more than 219,000 Americans went to the emergency room for eye injuries in 2006. More than half of those injuries occurred at home.

Ninety percent of home eye injuries can be prevented by wearing safety goggles while doing lawn work, cleaning or working on the car, experts say. Safety goggles should have "ANSI Z-87" stamped on the lenses or frames. The stamp means they have been certified by the American National Standards Institute.

People should also wash their hands when they complete their chores before touching their eyes or face.

"When we perform the same chores or tasks around the house, week after week, we can get complacent about how quickly accidents can happen," Daniel D. Garrett, senior vice president of Prevent Blindness America, said in a prepared statement. "We all need to take extra care when we're at home to protect our sight and not wind up in the emergency room."

Prevent Blindness America has declared September "Home Eye Safety Awareness Month" in an effort to draw attention to everyday risks to vision.

Children are at special risk because of their "creative" use of ordinary household items such as coat hangers, glue and pencils. Prevent Blindness America offers the following tips to help kids learn eye-safe behaviors:

- Teach children not to run around with forks, knives, pencils, combs or toothbrushes.
- Keep detergents, cleaning supplies, nail polish remover, mouthwash and cosmetics in locked cabinets or out of reach.
- Keep clothes hangers hanging in the closet.
- Place nails, glue, screwdrivers and other tools out of children's reach.
- Keep younger kids away from work areas where power tools are in use.

## Your Eyes and Diabetes: Seeing the Light

If you have diabetes, you are at a higher risk of developing eye disease. Diabetes specialists recommend having your eyes examined by an ophthalmologist (eye doctor) at least once a year. Your eyes should be dilated during the exam. That means eye drops are used to enlarge your pupils allowing the doctor to examine the retina in the back of the eye for signs of disease. Finding and treating the disease before it causes vision loss or blindness is the best way to control diabetic eye disease.



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## Common eye problems in people with diabetes

### Diabetic retinopathy (DR)

- Occurs only in diabetics.
- It damages blood vessels of your retina, the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye, which changes light into electrical impulses the brain interprets as images.
- There are no early symptoms. Get an eye exam yearly.
- Irreversible vision problems occur if the disease progresses.
- Laser surgery reduces the risk of severe vision loss from diabetic retinopathy by 60 percent.
- Better control of blood sugar level slows the onset and progression of retinopathy.

### Cataracts

- Cataracts cloud the eye's lens and cause vision to become blurry.
- Diabetics are twice as likely to develop a cataract as those who do not have diabetes.
- Cataracts tend to develop at an earlier age (around middle age) in people with diabetes.
- Cataracts can usually be treated by surgery.

### Glaucoma

- Glaucoma increases fluid pressure inside the eye.
- The disease leads to progressive optic nerve damage and loss of vision.
- This occurs with twice the frequency in diabetics as non-diabetics.
- Glaucoma may be treated with medications and laser or other forms of surgery.

