



101

BREAST
CANCER
FACTS

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THE FACTS

Evidence indicates that women are very concerned about the possibility of getting breast cancer. Given the prevalence of breast cancer and the number of individuals who die annually from it, such concern is more than justified. The information presented in 101 Breast Cancer Facts is designed to serve as a resource for those individuals who want to better understand the key factors involved in breast cancer.

Note: These facts were obtained from the best available medical and scientific sources to date. References are available upon request.

1. Surveys indicate that the number one health fear of most women is breast cancer.

2. A new case of breast cancer is diagnosed in the United States about every 3.5 minutes.

3. Early detection is the key to successful treatment of breast cancer.

4. The incidence of breast cancer in the United States has more than doubled in the past 30 years.

5. A woman living in the United States has a 12.3% (1 in 8) risk of developing breast cancer over her lifetime.

6. Being physically active boosts the odds that breast cancer patients will survive the disease.

7. Mammograms are considered the most effective tool for the early detection of breast cancer.

8. More than 180,000 women in the United States are diagnosed with breast cancer each year.

9. Approximately 41,000 women in the United States die annually from breast cancer.

10. The American Cancer Society recommends that every woman, 20 years and older, should perform a monthly breast self-examination.

11. The amount of radiation given off during a mammogram is relatively small, compared to the benefits of detecting breast cancer early.

12. A mammogram is not really painful, although it is a little uncomfortable for a few seconds (the time it takes to perform a mammogram), since your breast is placed between two plastic plates and flattened.

13. Eight out of ten lumps found in a breast are not cancerous.

14. More than 80% of breast cancers occur in women who do not have a family history of the disease.

15. Lymphedema associated with breast cancer treatment is the abnormal swelling of the arm with lymph fluid.

16. Forty-one percent of the lumps that are found in a breast appear in the upper-outer quadrant of the breast.

17. Aerobically fit women are three times less likely to die of breast cancer than those who seldom exercise.

18. While medications given to women at risk for developing breast cancer can reduce their risk level by up to half, these drugs have their own potential side effects, including a serious possibility for blood clots.

19. While mammography is the single most effective method of screening for breast cancer, other diagnostic tests (e.g., ultrasound, ductal lavage, cystic aspiration, MRI, Biopsies, etc.) can also be useful in selected situations.

20. The timing and type of hormone replacement therapy that some women take to relieve their menopausal symptoms may affect their overall breast cancer risk.

21. Forty five states mandate insurance coverage of mammograms with the only exceptions being Hawaii, Mississippi, South Carolina, Utah, and Wyoming.

22. Among the key treatment strategies for dealing with lymphedema following breast cancer treatment are arm wrapping/compression, massage, and very light exercise.

23. Genetic testing, combined with counseling from a qualified healthcare provider, may help a woman evaluate her risk of breast cancer and make smart preventive decisions about her health.

24. A woman's personal risk of breast cancer is related to both her genetics and her lifestyle.

25. Although breast cancer is rare in men (1%), it does happen.

26. About 2/3 of women over the age of 40 get regular mammograms, which means that 1/3 who do not are putting themselves at risk for serious health problems and late-stage breast cancer.

27. Five year survival rates for women diagnosed with local breast cancer (stages 1 and 2) are 98%, compared with just 26% for those who are diagnosed with distant metastatic cancer (stage 4).

28. African-American women are more likely than caucasian women to die of breast cancer at all ages.

29. Caucasian women over the age of 40 are more likely to develop breast cancer than African-American women of the same age.

30. It's common for women to have one breast that is larger than the other.

31. Taking oral contraceptives, which commonly include estrogen, may slightly increase the risk of breast cancer – a risk that decreases over time after discontinuation of OCPs.

32. Performing simple range-of-motion exercises for the shoulder can help women who have had breast cancer surgery return to full function and prevent a long-term loss of shoulder flexibility.

33. A targeted strength training program can help women regain the muscle strength and muscular balance that many women lose following breast cancer surgery.

34. Women who have had their first child after the age of 35 have approximately twice the lifetime risk of breast cancer, compared with women who have their first baby before age 20.

35. Some women of Ashkenazi Jewish heritage are at an increased risk of breast cancer because of a BRCA (genetic mutation).

36. Complementary therapies that purport to improve quality of life and reduce symptoms of breast cancer, such as acupuncture, herbal medicine, meditation, and therapeutic touch, should always be employed in addition to standard breast cancer treatment, not as a substitute for it.

37. The size of a woman's breasts does not affect her risk for getting breast cancer.

38. Six percent of the women in the United States develop breast cancer between their 50th and 70th birthdays.

39. Unless a cure is found, an estimated five million Americans will get breast cancer in the next 25 years – one million of whom could die.

40. The CDC provides low-income women with access to mammograms through The National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (www.cdc.gov/cancer/nbccedp).

41. About 20% of the breast implants in the United States are done as a part of reconstructive surgery related to breast cancer.

42. Since an abnormal mammogram doesn't always mean you have cancer, you should follow your physician's recommendation to take other tests (e.g., ultrasound or biopsy) to confirm or rule out the diagnosis.

43. You cannot get breast cancer by bumping, bruising, or pinching your breast.

44. Women with a strong family history of early breast cancer (i.e., two or more relatives diagnosed with breast cancer before age 50) are at an increased risk of developing the disease.

45. The breast is made up of glands (produce milk), ducts (carry milk to the nipple), and connective tissue (fibrous, lymph, and fat tissue holding everything together).

46. After skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common cancer in women, accounting for more than 25% of all cancers.

47. The National Cancer Institute (www.cancer.gov/bcrisktool) offers a variety of assessment tools that you can use to determine your relative personal risk for breast cancer.

48. No documented association has been found between breast implants (of any type) and an increased subsequent risk of breast cancer.

49. The states with the lowest rates of invasive breast cancer are Mississippi, Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah, while the highest rates exist in Washington and Connecticut.

50. Mammograms should be performed annually beginning at age 40.

51. Engaging in physical activity on a regular basis is directly linked to the prevention of breast cancer.

52. Performing 45 minutes of moderate-intensity activity five or more days a week can have a protective effect against breast cancer.

53. Excessive consumption of alcohol has been linked to breast cancer.

54. Losing weight can reduce your risk of breast cancer.

55. The Susan G. Komen Foundation for The Cure was founded by Ambassador Nancy G. Brinker as a promise to her sister, Suzy, who died of breast cancer at age 36.

56. Following breast cancer surgery or radiation treatment, gentle stretching 5-7 days per week can help reduce soft-tissue tightness.

57. According to the American College of Sports Medicine, women who have completed their cancer treatment should gradually introduce exercise back into their daily routine by engaging in repeated ten-minute bouts of exercise, such as walking or riding a stationary bike.

58. Every woman's breast cancer treatment strategy will be different, depending on the stage and characteristics of her cancer, her age, and the relative risks/benefits of various treatment options.

59. Breast reconstruction can be performed during mastectomy or in a separate, later surgery.

60. Human females are the only mammals who develop full breasts well before they're actually needed to nurse their offspring.

61. When breast surgery is part of a woman's cancer treatment plan, breast reconstruction may help to restore a woman's self-confidence, and aid her psychological recovery from her cancer experience.

62. Asian-American women have the lowest rate of breast cancer than any other racial or demographic group in the United States.

63. The most important risk factor for breast cancer is being female.

64. Women below the poverty level are approximately 50% less likely than women at higher incomes to have had a mammogram within the past two years.

65. If you are at an increased risk for breast cancer certain drugs such as tamoxifen and raloxifene may significantly lower your risk.

66. In the early stages of breast cancer no signs or symptoms of the condition exist, which is why routine screening is so important.

67. Obesity increases breast cancer risk in postmenopausal, but not premenopausal, women.

68. Research has shown that drinking two alcoholic drinks a day (24g of alcohol) can increase breast cancer risk by as much as 21%.

69. Mammograms can detect breast cancer up to two years before a lump can actually be felt.

70. Women who are overweight produce and store more estrogen in their bodies than women who have a healthy lower level of body mass index (BMI) are at a higher risk for breast cancer, since estrogen and breast cancer risk are linked.

71. Because obese women have a greater amount of breast tissue, which makes it more difficult to detect breast tumors in them, their cancer may reach a more advanced stage before it's detected, when it's harder to treat.

72. Since 80% of breast cancers are fueled by estrogen, exercise can reduce your risk since exercise is a natural way to reduce your estrogen levels, as well as diminish other hormones and growth factors that can cause breast cells to turn into cancer.

73. One large study conducted at Harvard University found that breast cancer patients who walk or do other kinds of moderate exercise for 3-to-5 hours a week are about 50% less likely to die from the disease than sedentary women.

74. October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

75. Unlike vigorous exercise, nonvigorous physical activity (e.g., light housework, leisure biking, etc.) has not been found to reduce breast cancer risk.

76. Advancing age is a risk factor for breast cancer – approximately 80% of breast cancer cases occur in women over age 50.

77. According to manufacturers, the size of the average American bra is getting larger – 36C and rising; despite rumors to the contrary, wearing a bra has nothing to do with breast cancer risk.

78. Although breast cancer is a serious concern for women, twice as many women die of heart disease and stroke as from all forms of cancer, including breast cancer.

79. Breastfeeding appears to protect against breast cancer.

80. Estrogen-receptor positive is the most common type of breast cancer.

81. A study published in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology* reported that exercise reduced mortality from all causes in breast cancer survivors by 50%, when combined with a healthy diet – a result that is true for both lean and obese women.

82. With regard to surviving breast cancer, the benefits of exercise are greatest in women whose breast cancer is sensitive to the hormone estrogen.

83. With regard to surviving breast cancer, women don't have to run marathons to achieve the maximum benefit from exercising, they should simply follow current government guidelines for physical activity.

84. Watch your weight - being overweight and obese are associated with increased rates of breast cancer.

85. Most research has not found that a consistent link between cigarette smoking and breast cancer exists.

86. Estimates indicate that over \$8 billion is spent each year in the United States on breast cancer treatment.

87. At the present time, there are more than 2,500,000 breast cancer survivors in the United States.

88. The 5-year relative survival rate for a woman, whose breast cancer has been diagnosed after her cancer has spread outside the breast (to adjacent lymph nodes, but not beyond) is almost 84%.

89. Approximately 95% of new cases of breast cancer and 97% of breast cancer deaths occur in women aged 40 and older.

90. As breast cancer grows, you may feel a painless lump in your breast, breasts that show thickening, swelling, heaviness, redness, or pain, or nipple abnormalities.

91. Because the risk of developing breast cancer is not the same for all women, every woman should be proactive in knowing and addressing her own risk factors.

92. Weight lifting can be beneficial for breast cancer survivors who have had their lymph nodes removed as a part of the treatment for their disease, since it helps them overcome any impairment they might suffer in their ability to respond to infection, trauma, injury, and inflammation.

93. Approximately 28% of all mammograms reveal false positives, which lead to more testing and invasive biopsies, neither of which are easy or without risk.

94. The more years a woman menstruates, the longer her breast tissue is exposed to estrogen, which increases her risk of breast cancer, since exposure to estrogen is a proven risk factor.

95. Radiation therapy to the chest for the treatment of other types of cancer increases the risk of breast cancer, depending on the dose of radiation and the age at which it is given.

96. Aromatase inhibitors, which block the action of the enzyme used to make all of the body's estrogen lower the risk of new breast cancers in postmenopausal women with a history of breast cancer.

97. Longer durations of hormone replacement therapy treatment (i.e., lasting more than two years) are generally associated with an elevated risk of breast cancer, regardless of the timing from menopause onset.

98. A breast cancer survivor with a body mass index (BMI) that is greater than 30% is 40% more likely to develop cancer in the other breast than a woman with a BMI lower than 25.

99. Some women who have a high risk of breast cancer may choose to have a prophylactic mastectomy – the removal of both breasts when no signs of cancer exist.

100. The median age for women who die from breast cancer is 68 years of age.

101. The pink ribbon is the national symbol for breast cancer awareness.

KNOWLEDGE MATTERS

Knowledge can be a very effective tool in your effort to prevent the occurrence of breast cancer, as well as any undertaking you might engage in to maximize your survival odds if you were to become afflicted with the disease. As such, relevant information can be very helpful to you when you're making a decision concerning breast cancer. In that regard, this document can be a potent asset to you if you want to be better informed about breast cancer.