



BREAST CANCER PREVENTION AND SCREENING

Cancer Prevention Series 4

Breast cancer is a malignant tumour formed in the breast tissues. It occurs in both women and men, although breast cancer in men is rare.

Am I at risk of breast cancer?

Risk factors to breast cancer include:

- Lack of physical activity
- Alcohol consumption
- Obesity after menopause
- Advancing age
- No childbirth, late first live birth (after age of 30) or no breastfeeding
- Early menarche (before age of 12) or late menopause (after age of 55)
- History of breast, ovarian or endometrial cancer
- History of benign breast conditions or lobular carcinoma *in situ*
- Receiving hormonal replacement therapy
- Using combined oral contraceptives

Women with the following risk factors are at **increased risk**:

- Family history of breast cancer or ovarian cancer, especially with first-degree relatives (mother, sister or daughter) diagnosed with breast cancer before age of 50
- Confirmed carrier (or family history) of certain gene (e.g. *BRCA1* or *BRCA2*) mutations
- History of receiving radiation therapy to the chest before age of 30



What are the common symptoms of breast cancer?

The symptoms of breast cancer may not be easily noticed at an early stage.

Common symptoms include:

- Breast lump
- A change in the size or shape of the breast
- A change in skin texture of the breast or nipple
- Rash around, in-drawing of, or discharge from the nipple
- New and persistent discomfort or pain in the breast or armpit
- A new lump or thickening in the armpit

You should consult a doctor as soon as possible if you develop any of the above symptoms.

How to reduce the chance of getting breast cancer?

- Have regular physical activities
- Avoid alcohol consumption
- Maintain a healthy body weight and waist circumference
- Have childbirth at an earlier age and breastfeed each child for longer duration

Why should I be breast aware?

Every woman should be breast aware. Women need to be familiar with the normal look, feel and cyclical changes of their breasts. If woman notice unusual changes in the breast, they should see a doctor as soon as possible.

What is breast cancer screening?

The purpose of breast cancer screening is to detect breast cancer before it gives rise to symptoms, so that early treatment can be initiated. Mammography is a widely used screening tool which is an X-ray examination of the breasts.



Should I get screened?

At present, there is insufficient scientific evidence to recommend for or against population-based mammography for local asymptomatic women at average risk.

Women at **moderate risk** of breast cancer should discuss with doctors the pros and cons of breast cancer screening before making an informed decision about mammography screening every 2 to 3 years.

Women at **high risk** (e.g. carriers of confirmed *BRCA1/2* gene mutations, with family history of breast cancer or ovarian cancer, history of receiving radiation therapy to the chest before age of 30, etc.) should seek doctor's advice for annual mammography screening and starting age for screening.

All screening tests have their limitations and they are not 100% accurate. There are false-positive and false-negative results.

All women who consider breast cancer screening should be adequately informed about the benefits and risks.



Department of Health