



## 2<sup>nd</sup> in a series of prevention tips on Cancer –

If you're a woman, breast cancer is probably right up there on your list of fears. It's either the [most common or second-most common cancer to affect women](#), depending on whose numbers you use. Since one out of every eight women will develop **invasive breast cancer** at some point in her life, most of us probably know someone who has faced the disease.

That's the bad news. The good news? There are some very simple things you can do right now that will [reduce your risk of breast cancer](#) or [improve your chances of survival](#) if you do develop it.

- 1) **Do monthly self-exams and [get an annual mammogram](#)** once you're old enough. Forget the goofy cartoons showing women with pancaked breasts after getting a mammogram. The procedure doesn't hurt. It's not the most fun thing ever, but I have a wussy pain tolerance. The worst part of the whole experience when I had my first one this summer was having it done on a day temperatures in my city topped 100 degrees, because you have to skip deodorant on test day. It felt like wearing a too-tight sports bra more than anything else. I went because I found a lump; it was terrifying, but most lumps are not breast cancer (mine wasn't), and if it is, early detection can save your life. Newer guidelines suggest waiting until **age 50 for the first mammogram**, but **some doctors recommend it at 40**.
- 2) **Limit alcohol consumption.** Drinking raises the risk of breast cancer; your risk goes up by 7 percent with each drink you have per day.
- 3) **Control your weight.** Obesity has a strong association with greater breast cancer risk, especially in post-menopausal women. It's unclear whether or not losing weight helps lower risk, so the best prevention is to just avoid gaining in the first place.
- 4) **Exercise.** Yes, it seems to be the fix for everything, but that's because it practically is a magic bullet. With regard to breast cancer, working out hard at least four hours per week drops your risk up to 40 percent.
- 5) **Know your family history.** Having a first-degree relative (mother or sister) with breast cancer raises your risk of someday getting it too. Being aware of your history could change your doctor's recommendations for screening, so talk to your family now. However, most breast cancer occurs in women without a family history, so that's not a free pass.
- 6) **Consider saying no to hormone therapy.** Estrogen-progestin therapies used to treat menopause raise the risk of breast cancer by 26 percent. Unless there is a compelling reason to use hormone therapy, think very carefully before you start popping pills. Other things lower your risk too ... early motherhood (before age 20) and breastfeeding have both been shown to reduce risk. But if the time for both of those has passed, you can still do other things to lower your chances of one day getting the disease.

**What are you doing to prevent breast cancer?**