



Breast cancer: Do you know your risks?

Every woman is at risk for breast cancer:

- Just being a woman is a risk factor: Every woman has at least a 1-in-8 lifetime risk of developing breast cancer. Furthermore:
 - 1 in 50 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer by the age of fifty years, and the risk of getting breast cancer increases as a woman ages.
 - Even young women get breast cancer. In my practice one third of our newly diagnosed breast cancers occur in women less than 50 years of age, and it is not unusual to diagnose women who are younger than 40 years old.

Knowing your risks and knowing what to do about them:

Risk Factors for being diagnosed with breast cancer:

- **Family History**
 - Family history: If you have one first degree relative (mother, sister, or daughter) who has been diagnosed with breast cancer, you are considered to be at an increased risk for getting breast cancer. If you have two first degree relatives, you are considered to be at a very high risk.
 - The risks are further increased if you have a first degree relative that had a breast cancer before age 50, if you have a family history of ovarian cancer, or if you have had multiple generations of family members with breast cancer.
 - The good news is that if you only have a second degree relative (i.e. grandmother or aunt) your risk is only minimally elevated.
 - Note that risk of breast cancer should be evaluated for both the mother's and father's side of the family.
- **History of High Risk Biopsy:**
 - If you have had a previous high risk biopsy you are at increased risk. High risk biopsies include those biopsies that show "atypia" or lobular carcinoma in situ. See "About Breast Cancer" on www.BeAwareFoundation.org for a more detailed discussion of high risk biopsies
- **Personal History of Risk Factors:**
 - Chest wall irradiation between the ages of 10 and 30 (i.e. mantle irradiation for Hodgkin's Disease).



- Male family member with breast cancer.
- Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry and a family history of breast cancer.
- Family member with BRCA1/2 mutation.
- More than 5 years of hormone replacement therapy (estrogen alone is of much lesser risk than estrogen + progesterone and in many cases the benefits of estrogen outweigh the potential risks).

What you can do to reduce your risk:

- Diet and exercise.
- Estrogen blocking therapy.
- Reducing or eliminating hormone replacement therapy.
- Avoid excess alcohol. (some guidelines recommend limiting alcohol intake to 3 ounces per week)
- Prophylactic nipple sparing mastectomy

How to measure your personal risk: link to: www.cancer.gov/bcrisktool/default.aspx

What to do to ensure early detection of breast cancer:

- Follow the Be Aware early detection guidelines:
 - Monthly self-examination (BSE). Menstruating women should perform BSE a few days after finishing their menstrual periods. Non-menstruating women should pick a day of the month, be consistent, and perform BSE on or about the same time each month.
 - Yearly mammogram starting at age 40, or sooner if high risk.
 - Yearly clinical examination (to be done more frequently if high risk).
 - Get a second opinion if you are not comfortable with what you've heard.
- If you are at an increased risk:
 - Follow the early detection guidelines above, AND
 - Have risk analysis and follow-up care at a "high risk" clinic. (ask your doctor for guidance or link to "Ask the Doctor.")
 - Consider a yearly MRI. (note that an MRI is typically only covered by insurance when high risk status has been established by a physician)
 - If at very high risk, consider genetic testing.

I hope this review has been helpful. If you have any question or comments on the information provided in this or any other section of "Ask the Doctor," you are encouraged to contact us.