

# Reduce **your risk** of breast cancer

**A GUIDE**



**Breast  
Cancer** **UK**



At least  
**30%**  
of breast cancer cases  
are preventable

# Reduce **your risk** of breast cancer

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in the UK – one in seven women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime. But the good news is at least 30% of breast cancer cases can be prevented. Studies suggest that if you make small changes to your lifestyle and daily habits, you could significantly reduce your risk of breast cancer.



## **Why do people get breast cancer?**

There are lots of reasons why, though there is still much we don't know. Many factors influence risk including your genes, age, sex, lifestyle, diet and environment.

## **How can I reduce my risk?**

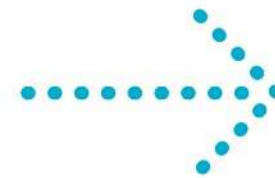
There are some things you can't directly control, your genes and your age for example. However, there are certain factors you do have some control over. This leaflet gives you some basic steps towards reducing your risk of developing breast cancer.

## **Why do I need to take action now?**

The sooner you start to reduce your risk, the earlier you could see the benefits. No matter what age you are, it's never too soon or too late to reduce your risk of breast cancer.

## **Is it hard to make a real difference?**

It may be easier than you think. No one is expecting you to be perfect. The trick is to understand your general risk, and then think about the changes you make that will have the most impact. Scan the QR code below to take our Prevention Quiz and find out what changes you could make.



Check out our top tips below to start your prevention journey today!

## Improve your lifestyle



### Drink less alcohol

It's best not to drink. If you drink, do it in moderation. Do not exceed the UK government guidelines of 14 units per week. There is a strong link between alcohol consumption and breast cancer. The more you drink, the greater your risk – for women, even one drink a day increases your risk. Alcohol increases oestrogen levels in the bloodstream and also, when broken down, produces harmful by-products which can damage DNA and increase the risk of certain cancers including breast cancer.



### Move your body

Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate physical activity a week to reduce your breast cancer risk. The more you do, the better. Physical activity not only reduces body fat, but lowers the levels of oestrogen and other hormones in your bloodstream. It also reduces inflammation and boosts your immune system, helping to lower cancer risk.



### Eat well, most of the time

You don't have to stick to a strict diet – just making simple, healthy choices most of the time can do the trick. A healthy diet, which is high in fruit, vegetables and wholegrains, organic when possible, will help keep your weight healthy and lower your risk of breast cancer.



### Maintain a healthy weight

Being overweight is a strong risk factor for breast cancer in men and postmenopausal women. Fat cells can convert male hormones into female hormones, a higher amount of fat means the possibility of more female hormones such as oestrogen in circulation. After menopause, fat cells become the main source of oestrogen, which means a higher risk of getting breast cancer if you are overweight.



## Stop disrupting your hormones!

Certain chemicals can interfere with our hormones. These are called endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs). They can mimic your natural hormones including oestrogen which can increase the rate of cell division. The more a cell divides, the more likely a mutation associated with breast cancer may occur. These chemicals can be found in anything from cosmetics to cleaning products and sometimes even in our food. For a list of chemicals to watch out for see our table below.



### Cosmetics

Some of the creams and other beauty products you use every day may contain EDCs. Products that are free from certain chemicals, can help to reduce levels of these compounds in your body.



### Household products

Cleaners, fire resistant textiles (furniture), pesticides, and plastics (children's toys) may also contain EDCs.



### HRT and the contraceptive pill

Some HRT and hormonal contraceptives, containing synthetic oestrogen and other hormones such as progesterone, can be associated with a small increased risk of breast cancer. This increase falls after you stop taking it.

There are some benefits to taking HRT or oral contraception. Deciding to take them is a personal choice that should be made after speaking to your doctor so you can make the right decision for you.



### Protect your baby

Protect the health of your unborn child, especially in early pregnancy, by avoiding alcohol, eating a healthy diet, and trying to avoid exposures to EDCs. Early exposures to these chemicals may lead to an increased risk of breast cancer for your child later in life.

## And did you know...



### Starting a family earlier

The younger you start having children (especially if you're under thirty) and the more children you have, the lower your risk of breast cancer.



### Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding can significantly reduce your risk of developing breast cancer. We appreciate it's not always possible for all mothers but if you are able to, even a short spell of breastfeeding is beneficial and the longer you do it, the better.



### Night light exposure

If you work nights or are exposed to light at night, your risk of breast cancer may go up. This may be because the body produces lower levels of the hormone melatonin, which is released at night. It regulates your internal body clock and helps protect you against breast and some other cancers.



### Smoking

Links between smoking and lung cancer are well documented, but if you started young or have been smoking a long time you could be more likely to get breast cancer.



### Breast cancer in men

Just under 400 men a year in the UK are diagnosed with breast cancer. If you're a man you're not immune, and many of the factors which increase the risk of female breast cancer also apply to you. For example, being overweight, excessive drinking and exposure to EDCs.

[breastcanceruk.org.uk](http://breastcanceruk.org.uk)

## Chemicals to watch out for

Here's a quick checklist of some chemicals to avoid. For more detailed information about why these are harmful, and how you can avoid them, visit our website

[breastcanceruk.org.uk](http://breastcanceruk.org.uk)



	Product	Endocrine Disrupting Chemical (EDC)
Cosmetics & personal care products	Makeup, shampoo, cleansers	Parabens e.g. ethyl paraben, methyl paraben, propyl paraben, butyl paraben
	Perfume, hair dyes, hair products	Phthalates e.g. diethyl phthalate (DEP); may be listed as "parfum" or "fragrance"
	Suncream, skin cream, lotions and powders	UV filters e.g. benzophenones, octylmethoxycinnamate or octocrylene
Household & industrial products	Antibacterial soaps, toothpaste, tooth whitening products, deodorants, shaving products, creams	Triclosan
	PVC & polycarbonate plastics, e.g. food containers, water bottles, packaging, toys, construction materials, flooring, electronics	Phthalates e.g., dibutyl phthalate Bisphenols e.g., BPA, BPS, BPAF
	Laundry products, cleaning sprays/cloths chopping boards, air fresheners	Triclosan
	Furniture and soft furnishings, clothing, building materials, electronics	Flame retardants e.g. Polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs)
Processed food	Stain protection for furniture, non-stick cookware, food packaging, floor waxes, cleaners, textiles	Poly- & perfluorinated alkyl substances (PFAS) e.g. PFOA and PTFE
	Crisps, sausages, bacon, ready meals etc	Parabens (E215, E216, E218, E219)

Disclaimer: This leaflet is for information purposes only and does not cover all breast cancer risks. Nor does it constitute medical advice and should not be used as an alternative to professional care. If you detect a lump or have any concerns, seek advice from your GP. Breast Cancer UK has made every effort to ensure the content of this leaflet is correct at the time of publishing but no warranty is given to that effect nor any liability accepted for any loss or damage arising from its use.

To view this information in a more accessible format or to provide feedback please contact us.

For full references relating to this leaflet, please visit our website.



Patient Information Forum

## Who we are

Breast Cancer UK uses the latest academic research on breast cancer prevention to provide guidance on how to reduce your risk. We campaign for better breast cancer prevention policies and fund animal-free research.

## Support us

**Fundraise** From cake sales to running marathons, there are so many ways to support us. For ideas and help, head to our website.

**Donate** You can make a single or regular donation, through our website or via the post.

**Leave a legacy in your Will** Your legacy will help us to prevent breast cancer in future generations.

**Companies** Whether you'd like to undertake a team building event, make a direct donation or partner with us – contact us for support.

**Campaign** Endorse one of our campaigns on an issue that could help save lives. Help spread our prevention message in the workplace or your community.

**Breast Cancer UK Ltd**  
BM Box 7767  
London  
WC1N 3XX  
Tel: 0208 1327088

✉ [info@breastcanceruk.org.uk](mailto:info@breastcanceruk.org.uk)  
🐦 [breastcancer\\_UK](https://twitter.com/breastcancer_UK)  
📘 [breastcanceruk](https://www.breastcanceruk.org.uk)  
@ [breastcanceruk](https://www.breastcanceruk.org.uk)  
**[breastcanceruk.org.uk](https://www.breastcanceruk.org.uk)**