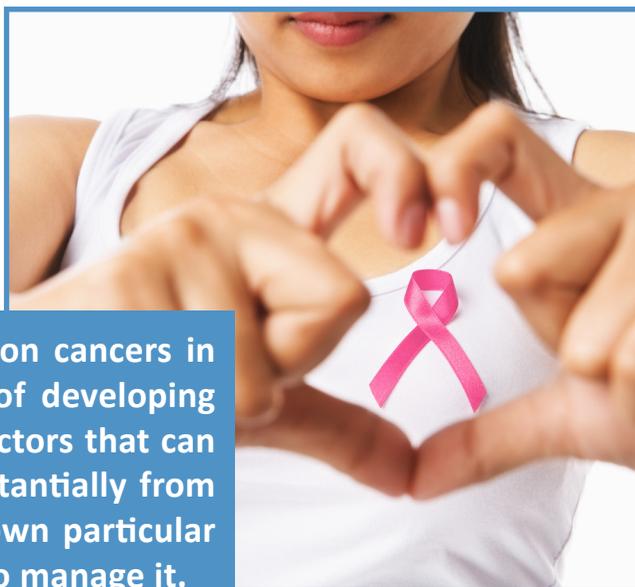


Breast cancer: Know the risks



Breast cancer is one of the most common cancers in women. Every woman is at some risk of developing breast cancer but there are many risk factors that can make one woman's situation differ substantially from another's. When you understand your own particular risk profile, you are in a better position to manage it.

A woman's risk of developing breast cancer increases with age. More than 3 out of 4 cases occur in women over the age of 50. A personal history of breast cancer is a risk factor for breast cancer recurrence or the formation of new breast cancer. In other words, if you have already had cancer in one breast, you have an increased risk of developing cancer in the other breast.

A family history of breast cancer can have a significant impact on your risk, but don't automatically assume that any case of breast cancer in your family means that you are a high-risk candidate.

You have a higher chance of developing breast cancer if you have:

- A mother, sister, or daughter with breast cancer.
- Multiple generations of family members affected by breast or ovarian cancer.
- Relatives who were diagnosed with breast cancer at a young age (under 50 years old).
- Relatives who had both breasts affected by cancer.

Other risk factors include:

- Increased oestrogen exposure, as evidenced by a first menstrual period before age 13, late menopause (after age 55), or the use of hormone replacement therapy (HRT).

- Never having been pregnant or having your first pregnancy after the age of 30.
- Being overweight, especially after menopause.
- Drinking alcohol (cancer risk doubles with three or more drinks a day).
- Smoking cigarettes.
- Having a sedentary lifestyle with little regular exercise and an unhealthy diet.

Early detection is key

The good news is that the earlier breast cancer is diagnosed and treated, the greater the likelihood that it can be successfully treated.

It is important to be aware of regular and thorough methods of early detection. People whose cancer is diagnosed when the cancer is contained in the breast have a much higher five-year survival rate compared to those where the cancer has already spread at diagnosis.

Women are recommended to perform monthly self-examinations in order to be familiar with the look and feel of their breasts. If you notice any changes, speak to your doctor immediately.

Speak to your doctor regarding which method of screening (and how often) is best for you. If you have a personal history or a family history of breast cancer, you may need to be screened more often.