



# NC FEMALE BREAST CANCER



## What is female breast cancer?

Female breast cancer refers to any cancer that forms in a woman's breast. Besides skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common type of cancer in American women.<sup>1</sup> Doctors estimate that about 5-10 % of female breast cancers are linked to gene mutations. The most well-known inherited mutated genes are female breast cancer gene 1 (BRCA1) and female breast cancer gene 2 (BRCA2), both of which significantly increase the risk of breast and ovarian cancer.<sup>2</sup>

## Risk Factors

These risk factors may increase your chances for developing female breast cancer.

- **Age.** Most female breast cancer is diagnosed in women over 50 years old.
- **Being female.** Breast cancer can occur in both men and women, but it is more common in women.
- **Family history of female breast cancer.** Having a mother, sister or daughter who had breast cancer puts you at an increased risk.
- **Gene mutations.**
- **Previous history with breast cancer.** You are at an increased risk for developing new breast cancer if you have already had breast cancer.
- **Dense breast tissue.** Dense breast tissue, where the breast has more connective tissue than fatty tissue, can make it harder to see a tumor on a mammogram. This can lead to a later stage diagnosis and reduce the chances of successful treatment.
- **Reproductive history.** Your chances are increased if you started your menstrual cycle early (before 12 years old) and/or started or went through menopause later (after 55 years old). This longer period gives you more exposure to hormones.<sup>3</sup>
- **Previous radiation therapy to the chest.**

## Symptoms

Most people do not have any symptoms of breast cancer until the cancer is advanced. Breast cancer symptoms may include:

- a lump or hard knot in your breast or armpit area,
- dimpling or irritation of your breast skin,
- redness, thickening or swelling of part of your breast,
- a change in the size or shape of your breast,
- nipple pain, tenderness or discharge (other than breast milk, including blood),
- a nipple turning inward or inverted, and/or
- pain in any area of your breast.<sup>5</sup>

## Female Breast Cancer in NC

Female breast cancer was the second leading cause of cancer deaths in North Carolina women in 2019 (1,356 deaths). It is estimated that 9,611 women in North Carolina will be diagnosed with breast cancer and 1,508 women will die from breast cancer in 2021. North Carolina's rates are higher than the national rates for new cases of female breast cancer.<sup>4</sup>

## Screening

The goal of breast cancer screening is to detect cancer early before you have any symptoms. Breast cancer screening is usually done through a mammogram. Screening does not prevent you from getting breast cancer, but it increases your chances of detecting it early. A breast cancer tumor diagnosed from a screening is usually smaller and in a more defined area. Depending on your family history, you should start getting mammograms every year or two starting at 50 years old.

Talk to your healthcare provider about when to start and how often to get screened.



# You can reduce your Breast Cancer Risk!

- **Get a mammogram.** Talk to your healthcare provider about when you should start getting a mammogram.
- **Be physically active.** Strive to get at least 30 minutes of physical activity 5 days a week and strength training at least twice a week.
- **Eat Healthy.** Eat more fruits and vegetables, drink more water and fewer sugar-sweetened beverages and create meal plans to cook at home.
- **Know your family health history including cancer illnesses and deaths.**
- **Don't drink alcohol or limit your alcohol intake.** No more than one drink per day for women, two drinks per day for men.
- **Quit tobacco and vaping use.** Quitting takes practice! Coaching and medications can triple your chances of quitting for good. Call 1-800-Quit-Now or check out [www.QuitlineNC.com](http://www.QuitlineNC.com) for help.

## Treatment

Treatment is usually most successful when cancer is detected early. Breast cancer treatment options include surgery, chemotherapy, hormone therapy, radiation and targeted therapies. Treatment depends on the kind of breast cancer you have and how far it has spread. Talk to your cancer doctor about the treatment options available for your type and stage of cancer. Your doctor can explain the risks and benefits of each treatment and their side effects.



## A cancer diagnosis is an Unexpected Journey.

Talk with your healthcare provider about a health care plan to help track your care and to support your physical and emotional health needs. Ask for a patient navigator. They will help guide you through your journey and connect you to resources and support services. Be your own advocate. Build your support circle. Continue to take steps to be healthy. These steps may help improve your quality of life and lower the risk of your cancer returning.

## Take Action!

Use My Health Action Plan to set monthly goals to make healthy lifestyle changes.

<https://publichealth.nc.gov/cccp/>

## Don't wait, start on your My Health Action Plan today!

Need help? Talk to your healthcare provider or visit the resources below.

NC DHHS, Cancer Prevention and Control Branch. <https://publichealth.nc.gov/cccp>

NC DHHS Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program. <https://bcccp.ncdhhs.gov>

American Cancer Society. [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

NC Care360. <https://nccare360.org>

Pretty in Pink Foundation. [www.prettyinpinkfoundation.org/who-we-are](http://www.prettyinpinkfoundation.org/who-we-are)

Susan G. Komen. <https://komennc.org>



### References

- 1 - American Cancer Society, How Common is Breast Cancer? [www.cancer.org/cancer/breast-cancer/about/how-common-is-breast-cancer.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/breast-cancer/about/how-common-is-breast-cancer.html)
- 2 - BreastCancer.org, Genetics. <https://www.breastcancer.org/risk/factors/genetics>
- 3 - American Cancer Society, Breast Cancer Risk Factors You Cannot Change. [www.cancer.org/cancer/breast-cancer/risk-and-prevention/breast-cancer-risk-factors-you-cannot-change.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/breast-cancer/risk-and-prevention/breast-cancer-risk-factors-you-cannot-change.html)
- 4 - State Center for Health Statistics, NC Department of Health and Human Services, Central Cancer Registry. <https://schs.dph.ncdhhs.gov/data/cancer.cfm>
- 5 - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, What are the Symptoms of Breast Cancer? [www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/basic\\_info/symptoms.html](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/basic_info/symptoms.html)



NC Department of Health and Human Services · Division of Public Health  
· Cancer Prevention & Control Branch · <https://publichealth.nc.gov> ·  
NCDHHS is an equal opportunity employer and provider. · 04/2021