

RISK FACTORS FOR BREAST CANCER

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- Each year almost 3000 New Zealand women and 25 men are diagnosed with breast cancer. There are more than 650 deaths from breast cancer every year.
- In New Zealand, women have an average lifetime risk of 11% (1 in 9) of being diagnosed with breast cancer at some time in their lives. This means the chance that they will never have breast cancer is 89%.
- For every person who is diagnosed, many other people are affected including husbands, wives, partners, children, family and friends.

Main risk factors for breast cancer:

Gender:

Being female and having breasts is the highest risk factor.

Increasing age:

The risk of developing breast cancer increases with age. Approximately 75% of all breast cancers are diagnosed in women 50 years and over.

Age	Risk ratio	Risk percentage
30s	1 in 204	0.5%
40s	1 in 67	1.5%
50s	1 in 35	2.8%
60s	1 in 33	3.0%
70s	1 in 38	2.6%

Other risk factors include:

Family history:

Approximately 13% of people diagnosed with breast cancer have a family history of the disease. On average, women with a mother, sister or daughter with breast cancer are at twice the risk of those with no affected first-degree relative.

Only 5-10% of breast cancers are inherited, most commonly because of a BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene mutation.

You can be at increased risk of developing breast cancer if you have:

- Multiple close relatives on the same side of your family affected by breast cancer or ovarian cancer.
- Relatives diagnosed with breast cancer before the menopause.
- Breast and ovarian cancer diagnosed in the same relative.
- Relatives diagnosed with bilateral breast cancer.
- Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry.
- Anyone concerned about their family history should discuss their personal risk with their doctor.

Previous medical history

- Women who have had a diagnosis of breast cancer have an increased risk of developing cancer in the opposite breast.
- Pre-cancerous conditions such as DCIS (ductal carcinoma in situ) and LCIS (lobular carcinoma in situ) and some benign breast conditions such as atypical ductal hyperplasia are associated with a higher risk of developing breast cancer.
- Previous radiation treatment to the chest e.g for lymphoma before the age of 30 years is known to raise breast cancer risk.

High breast density

Women whose breasts contain a high proportion of glandular and connective tissue versus fat tissue are at increased risk compared to women with low breast density. The dense tissue makes mammograms harder to assess plus the increased breast density may reflect hormonal influences.

Alcohol

Several studies, for example the Million Women study (2002) link alcohol intake (more than one glass per day) to an increased risk for breast cancer – approximately 7% for every additional drink.

Hormone Replacement Therapy

Multiple randomised controlled trials have demonstrated a consistent and significant increased risk of developing breast cancer in women who have taken combined HRT (oestrogen and progestin) for more than 5 years compared with women who have never taken HRT.

*** For further information, women should talk to their family doctor who can assess their risk in a personalized context.

Hormonal influences

Early age at first menstruation, not having children or later age at first birth (over 30), and late menopause (over 55)are associated with an increased breast cancer risk.

Overweight or obesity

Women who are overweight or obese after menopause have a higher risk of developing breast cancer than women who are lean.

Some of these risk factors, such as age, gender, genetics can't be changed but others are related to lifestyle. By choosing to live a healthy lifestyle you can ensure that your risk is as low as it can be.