

Can Adolescents Reduce Lifetime Breast Cancer Risk?

With much of their lives ahead of them, young adults likely are not spending too much time thinking about their vulnerability to disease. However, adopting an "it can't happen to me" mentality may cause individuals to engage in habits that can increase their risk for certain illnesses, including breast cancer.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women, affecting around one in eight women, reports the American Cancer Society. The National Breast Cancer Foundation advises that only 5 to 10 percent of breast cancer cases are linked to inherited mutations in genes like BRCA1 and BRCA2. That means the majority of breast cancer cases are a byproduct of something other than genetics. Some may be the result of lifestyle choices. Dense breasts, high

hormone exposure, and obesity are each risk factors for breast cancer. Adolescents may not be thinking about preventive health care, but that should not stop them from educating themselves about how they can lower their overall lifetime risk of developing breast cancer.

- Exercise regularly. Routine exercise and aiming for at least two hours of recreational physical activity or sports each week can help lower stress and reduce future breast density. Moderate to vigorous movement each day is good for overall health.

- Eat a balanced diet. Susan G. Komen® advises that focusing on whole foods and a diet rich in vegetables, fruits, fiber, and whole grains is important. Also, one should reduce intake of inflammatory foods, such as sugary drinks,

processed snack foods, and red meat.

- Avoid alcohol. Skipping alcoholic beverages during adolescence and into early adult years can protect developing breast tissue. The National Cancer Institute says some studies found that women who drank alcohol in their teen years may have an increased risk of breast cancer in adulthood.

- Skip cigarettes. Avoiding tobacco use or quitting early can help lower breast cancer risk. Smoking at a young age significantly increases long-term cancer risk, reports the Breast

Cancer Research Foundation.

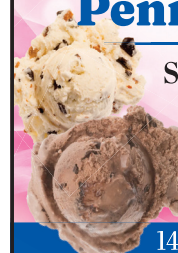
While not every case of breast cancer can be avoided, adolescents can employ strategies to protect themselves against breast cancer.



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