

Protecting your breast health

Know your risk factors
and get screened



It is well known that breast cancer affects a significant number of women. In fact, it is the second most common form of cancer in women, with [1 in 8 developing the disease at some point in their life](#).¹ This is why regular screenings are important. They help find the cancer early when it is still localized, before it has a chance to spread, and it is more easily treated.

The basics on breast cancer screenings

The [most recent screening recommendation](#) is that women who are at average risk for breast cancer should get a mammogram every two years between the ages of 40 and 74.² Learn about the different types of screenings available and what to expect.

- **Mammogram** — This is [the most common screening](#). It involves a low-dose X-ray of your breast tissue producing images your care team can review for any issues.³
- **Breast ultrasound** — This screening can be helpful for [women with dense breasts](#), meaning they have more connective breast tissue that makes tumors harder to detect on a regular mammogram.⁴
- **Breast MRI** — This screening is typically recommended in addition to an annual mammogram only for women with a high risk of breast cancer.⁵

It's important to have an open and honest conversation about your breast cancer risk factors and screening options with your doctor. Together, you can develop a screening plan you both feel comfortable with.

Risk factors for breast cancer

Unfortunately, there are several [risk factors for breast cancer](#) that are beyond your control.⁶ These risk factors include:

- **Age** — A majority of breast cancer cases happen in women over 50. So it's important to keep up with preventive screenings as you get older.
- **Genetic mutations** — Having certain gene mutations like BRCA1 and BRCA2 can increase the risk of developing breast cancer. Depending on your family medical history, your doctor may recommend testing for these mutations with a blood test.
- **Reproductive history** — Getting your period before 12 or starting menopause after 55 can raise your risk of breast cancer due to the longer exposure to hormones.
- **Personal and family medical history** — If a blood relative has a history of breast or ovarian cancer, you may be at increased risk as well.





Prioritizing your breast health

While there are factors you can't control, [there are parts of your health you can take more control of that can also have an impact on your overall breast cancer risk.](#)⁷ Start by focusing on:

- **Physical activity.** Research has shown that the risk for breast cancer is 25% lower for women who are physically active on a regular basis.
- **Nutritious eating.** Whole grains, omega-3 fatty acids, and colorful fruits and vegetables all provide nutrients. It also helps to avoid foods with added sugars and too many saturated fats.
- **Weight management.** Obesity has been shown to increase the risk of cancer after menopause, as well as the risk of it spreading or returning after initial treatment.
- **Reducing unhealthy behaviors.** It can help your risk to quit or avoid smoking and limit your alcohol intake.

If you or someone close to you has been diagnosed with breast cancer, visit reach.cancer.org to find support through treatment and recovery.



If you don't have a regular doctor, use the Find Care tool in the [SydneySM Health](#) app or anthem.com to find one in your plan's network.



¹ American Cancer Society: *Key Statistics for Breast Cancer* (January 22, 2025); cancer.org.

² U.S. Preventive Services Task Force: *Breast Cancer: Screening* (April 30, 2024); uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org.

³ Mayo Clinic: *Mammogram* (August 25, 2023); mayoclinic.org.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: *About Dense Breasts* (November 9, 2023); cdc.org.

⁵ American Cancer Society: *Breast MRI* (January 14, 2022); cancer.org.

⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: *Breast Cancer Risk Factors* (September 11, 2024); cdc.org.

⁷ Cleveland Clinic: *6 Ways To Boost Breast Health* (April 8, 2024); health.clevelandclinic.org.

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