

RISK REDUCTION AND HEALTHY LIFESTYLE CHOICES

February 2018



Get active, watch your weight and cut back on alcohol to reduce your risk of breast cancer.

- In New Zealand, breast cancer is the most common female cancer with around 3000 new cases expected this year. Also approximately 25 men will be diagnosed.
- There are more than 650 deaths from breast cancer each year and one in nine New Zealand women have a risk of being diagnosed at some point in their lives.
- While some risk factors for breast cancer- e.g. being a woman, getting older and having a strong family history of the disease- are outside of their control, there are some simple lifestyle changes which women can make to reduce their risk. International studies have shown a relationship between a healthy lifestyle and a reduction in many cancers.

The three most important lifestyle choices women can make to reduce their breast cancer risk are:

Weight control

The New Zealand Health Survey 2016/17 showed that around 1 in 3 adults (aged 15 years and over) were obese (32%)

A number of research studies estimate that being physically inactive, and obese or overweight are factors that account for one in five breast cancer cases. (20%) For post-menopausal women who are overweight or obese (BMI >25) the risk of breast cancer is increased by 40% compared to lean women (BMI less than 21).

To calculate your BMI (body mass index) go to www.heartfoundation.org.nz/wellbeing/bmi-calculator

Women should try to maintain a healthy body weight throughout life to reduce their risk.

Physical Activity

Regular physical activity appears to decrease post-menopausal breast cancer risk, mainly through weight control. One recent study on physical activity and breast cancer shows a 15-20% decreased risk for pre- and post-menopausal breast cancer combined.

Aim to build up your exercise to at least 30 minutes 3-5 times a week. The more exercise you do the greater the benefits in lowering your risk.

International research studies show a relationship between a healthy lifestyle and a reduction in many cancers. A report from the World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) made eight recommendations for cancer prevention. The recommendations are designed to contribute to healthy dietary patterns, healthy ways of life and general wellbeing.

They are:

1. Body size – maintain a healthy body weight throughout life.
2. Physical activity – be physically active as part of everyday life (brisk walking for at least 30 minutes daily and limit inactive habits like watching television).
3. Food and drinks that promote weight gain – limit your intake of high calorie foods, avoid sugary drinks and consume fast foods sparingly.
4. Fruit and vegetables – eat mostly foods of plant origin such as non-starchy vegetables and fruits (at least five portions/servings daily).
5. Meat – limit your intake of red meat (beef, pork and lamb - no more than 300 gms per week) and avoid processed meat (meat preserved by smoking, curing, salting or chemicals).
6. Alcoholic drinks – limit alcoholic drinks to no more than two standard drinks a day for men and one standard drink a day for women.
7. Preservation, processing, preparation – limit your consumption of salt and avoid mouldy cereals (grains) or pulses (legumes).
8. Dietary supplements – aim to meet your nutritional needs through diet alone as dietary supplements are not recommended for cancer prevention Make healthy lifestyle choices to reduce your breast cancer risk.

Limit Alcohol

Although not a popular message, even moderate alcohol consumption increases your risk of breast cancer. Several large research studies including the Million Women Study (2002) link alcohol intake (more than one standard drink a day) to an increased risk for breast cancer – approximately 7-10% for every additional drink.

How does alcohol cause an increased risk? A key reason is alcohol interferes with oestrogen metabolism: oestrogen levels are increased. To reduce oestrogen levels and therefore your risk, alcohol free days are recommended.

Make healthy lifestyle choices to reduce your breast cancer risk.