

## 7 Super-Effective Ways to Prevent Breast Cancer



Here are 7 ways to reduce your risk of developing breast cancer

In the last 25 years, the incidence of breast cancer among Indian women has risen.

According to information available on the Tata Memorial Hospital's website worldwide, breast cancer is the most common of all cancers and is the leading cause of cancer deaths. In fact, a recent study of breast cancer risk in India revealed that one in 28 women develops breast cancer during her lifetime. This is higher in urban areas (one in 22) compared to rural areas, where the risk is lower at one in 60 women. But there is no single cause, says Lester Barr, breast cancer surgeon and chairman of the UK-based charity Genesis Breast Cancer Prevention. "Breast cancer is caused by the interplay of your genes, the environment you live in and lifestyle factors." In addition to going for mandatory screenings and tests, you can make lifestyle changes to lower your risk.

**1. Do house work:** Experts say that being active reduces a woman's risk of breast cancer. Exercise reduces the number of fat cells, which are responsible for the release of hormones such as oestrogen and testosterone. It is these fat cells that are thought to encourage tumour growth. Eluned Hughes, head of public health at UK's Breakthrough Breast Cancer, says, women should aim for 30 minutes of moderate physical activity a day. This can reduce breast cancer risk by at least 20 per cent. Anything that gets your heart rate up and leaves you feeling a bit out of breath will do, so tackle every day chores like dusting the house with gusto.

**2. Breastfeed your baby:** Women who breast-feed for a year over their lifetime, not necessarily continuously, are five per cent less likely to develop breast cancer than those who don't breast-feed at all, an analysis of cancer statistics by the World Cancer Research Fund found. The longer a woman breast-feeds, the lower her chances of getting the disease. It's thought that breast-feeding lowers the levels of cancer-related hormones in the mother's blood. When breast-feeding ends, the body gets rid of damaged cells that could turn cancerous.

**3. Drink less booze:** Regularly drinking alcohol increases your risk of developing breast cancer and the more drinks you have each day, the greater your risk will be," says Highes. Try simple measures to reduce how much you drink. Have one glass instead of two, enjoy alcohol-free nights and drink from smaller wine glasses to reduce your units.

**4. Curtail night shifts:** Women who work at least three night shifts a week for six years or more are twice as likely to develop breast cancer, Danish researchers claim. But more research needs to be done. UK's Health and Safety Executive has commissioned a study that is due to be published in 2015 and should help find more answers.

However, docs say it's not clear if it's the unhealthy behaviour caused by working night shifts, like eating poorly and being inactive, that's the possible cause, rather than the shift work itself. Women, therefore, need to think about their overall lifestyle, whatever hours they work.

**5. Reduce cholesterol:** Women who take statins (drugs that lower cholesterol levels) for more than a decade face doubling the risk of developing invasive ductal carcinoma, or IDC, the most common type of breast cancer, according to the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center. While studies suggest the short-term use of statins appears to have a protective effect against breast cancer, in the long run, statins may damage certain chemical pathways that lead to the growth of tumours. However, do not stop taking statins without consulting the doctor.

**6. Avoid unhealthy chemicals:** Don't use canned food and drinks and don't microwave food in plastic containers, warns nutritionist, Conner Middelmann-Whitney. They contain chemicals that behave like oestrogens, increasing breast cancer risk. High temperature barbecuing, grilling or frying meat can trigger the production of acrylamide that also increase cancer risk so try to cook meat gently and make an effort to avoid preserved meats as well.

**7. Step out in the sun:** Natural sunlight is the best way of increasing stores of vitamin D, which can lower your risk of breast cancer, say Canadian researchers. Laboratory tests suggest breast cells can convert vitamin D to a hormone that has anti-cancer properties. This advice should, however, be balanced against the risk of developing skin cancer from sun exposure.