



# Your Family History & Breast Cancer

Nationally, one in eight women will get breast cancer in her lifetime. In Oregon, breast cancer is the most common cancer among women. If you have a mother or sister with breast cancer, your chance of developing breast cancer is about double that of someone with no family history.\*

The more people in your family who have had breast cancer, the higher your chance of getting breast cancer. Also if those family members got cancer at a young age that puts you at a greater risk.

The good news is...most women with a family history of breast cancer will *not* get breast cancer themselves, even though they are at higher risk.

If you know of a family member who has had breast cancer, then you may want to write down your family health history.

## *What is a Family Health History?*

Like cancer, many health problems run in families. Families share their habits, environments, and lifestyles, as well as their genes.

A Family Health History is a record of you and your close family's health. By taking your family health history and sharing it with your doctor, you can learn what health problems you may be at higher risk for and how to reduce your chances of developing the disease or detect it early.

## *What can you do if you think you have a family history of breast cancer?*

- » Use the Surgeon General's family history tools: My Family Health Portrait can be found at <http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory/>
- » The next time you go to your doctor, take your family history with you and share it with your doctor.
- » Share your family health history with your relatives who may also be at greater risk.
- » Take action to reduce other things that put you at risk for getting breast cancer.



*Besides family history, here are some other things that may put you at risk for breast cancer:*

- Being overweight and/or too little physical activity
- Risk increases as we get older
- Being Caucasian or Ashkenazi Jewish
- Early menstruation (before age 12) and later menopause (after age 50)
- Women who had their first child after age 30 and women who have no children are at higher risk.
- Some types of hormone replacement therapies
- Taking Diethylstilbestrol (DES): a medication used to prevent miscarriage in US until 1971
- Benign breast disease



*Things you can do to reduce your risk of breast cancer or detect it early:*

- Lose weight if you are overweight.
- Eat a **balanced diet** including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat or fat-free dairy products, and lean meats.
- **Get active.** Moderate activity 30 minutes at least 5 days of the week has big benefits.
- **Breast feed** which lowers your risk for breast cancer and has many benefits for your child.
- **Talk to your health care provider about medications that might reduce your risk.** Some women at high risk benefit from taking drugs such as tamoxifen or raloxifene.
- **Talk to your health care provider about your family history and screening.**
  - If you have a strong family history of breast cancer, national guidelines recommend screening at 40 or 5-10 years before the youngest case in the family.\*\*
  - Your health care provider can review your family health history and see what screening is right for you.
- **Cancer risk assessment and genetic counseling.** If you have a strong family history of cancer, your health care provider may send you to a genetic counselor. A genetic counselor can do a cancer risk assessment to see if other screening or testing should be done. National guidelines provide direction about who should be referred for genetic counseling.\*\*\*

*Where can I learn more?*

Oregon Genetics Program  
[www.oregongenetics.org](http://www.oregongenetics.org)

National Cancer Institute  
[www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

FORCE Facing Our Risk of Cancer Empowered  
[www.facingourrisk.org](http://www.facingourrisk.org)

Susan G. Komen Foundation  
[www.komen.org](http://www.komen.org)

American Cancer Society  
[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

US Surgeon General Family History Website  
[www.hhs.gov/familyhistory](http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory)

"This is not just knowledge for knowledge's sake. Knowing your family health history can save your life, as well as the lives of those you love." 2006 Acting Surgeon General Kenneth P. Moritsugu, M.D., M.P.H.

Oregon  
Genetics  
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[www.oregongenetics.org](http://www.oregongenetics.org)

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\* NCI PDQ <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/pdq/>

\*\*National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN) Breast Cancer Screening Guidelines v.1.2007

\*\*\*NCCN Genetic/Familial High-Risk Assessment: Breast and Ovarian Guidelines and US Preventative Services Task Force Genetic Risk Assessment and BRCA Mutation Testing for Breast and Ovarian Cancer Susceptibility