

# Women's Health

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In February 2021, the World Health Organization announced that Breast Cancer became the most commonly-diagnosed cancer in the world.<sup>1</sup> In the US, it is estimated that approximately 30% of newly diagnosed cancers in women will be breast cancer in 2021.<sup>2</sup>

Medicine is never static. Every day ground-breaking research and new statistics are published, novel drugs are developed, and innovative medical devices become standard of care. While new ways of treating, diagnosing, and managing patients may grab the headlines, it can be easy to overlook the basics, such the factors that increase a person's risk to develop breast cancer.

While the two most significant risk factors for breast cancer are being a woman and aging<sup>2,3</sup>, other factors can play a role in increasing someone's risk and may impact their wellness. Some of these, like having a BRCA mutation, have been highly publicized in the media; but, other risk factors may be unknown to your patients.

## Some established risk factors include, but are not limited to:

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	White women are slightly more likely to develop breast cancer than Black, Hispanic, and Asian women; however, Black women are more likely to develop more aggressive, more advanced-stage breast cancer that is diagnosed at a young age. <sup>4</sup>
<b>Family History</b>	Having a first-degree relative female or male who has been diagnosed with breast cancer, multiple family members on either side of the family who have had breast or ovarian cancer. <sup>3,4</sup>
	Women who took the drug diethylstilbestrol (DES) between 1940 and 1971 to prevent miscarriage. This is also true for women whose mothers took DES while pregnant with them. <sup>3,4</sup>
<b>Personal History of Breast Cancer</b>	Women who have had breast cancer are more likely to get breast cancer a second time. Some non-cancerous breast diseases such as atypical hyperplasia or lobular carcinoma in situ are associated with a higher risk of getting breast cancer. <sup>3</sup>
<b>Reproductive History</b>	Early menstrual periods before age 12 and starting menopause after age 55 expose women to hormones longer. <sup>3</sup>
	Having the first pregnancy after age 30, not breastfeeding, and never having a full-term pregnancy. <sup>3</sup>
	Some forms of hormone replacement therapy (those that include both estrogen and progesterone) taken during menopause can raise risk for breast cancer when taken for more than five years and certain birth control pills can increase the risk of being diagnosed with breast cancer. <sup>3,4</sup>

<b>Radiation to Chest or Face Before Age 30</b>	Women with previous treatment using radiation therapy to the chest or breasts for another cancer or to the face as an adolescent to treat acne. <sup>3,4</sup>
<b>Lifestyle</b>	Lack of physical activity <sup>3,4</sup>
	Being overweight or obese, especially after menopause <sup>3,4</sup>
	Drinking alcohol (studies show that a woman's risk for breast cancer increases with the more alcohol she drinks) <sup>3-5</sup>
	Smoking is linked to a higher risk of breast cancer in younger, premenopausal women. <sup>4</sup>

In recent years, research has suggested other risk factors may have an impact on someone's risk to develop breast cancer. Some of these emerging risks include:

**Low Vitamin D Levels** - Vitamin D may play a role in controlling normal breast cell growth and may be able to stop breast cancer cells from growing.<sup>4</sup>

**Light Exposure at Night** - Results of several studies suggest that women who work at night or who live in areas with high levels of external light at night (e.g. street lights) have a higher risk of breast cancer.<sup>4</sup>

**Eating Unhealthy Food** - Diet is thought to be at least partly responsible for about 30% to 40% of all cancers.<sup>4</sup>

**Exposure to Chemicals** - Research suggests that things such as cosmetics, plastics, and lawn/garden products can contain particular chemicals that may contribute to increased cancer risk when there have been certain levels of exposure.<sup>4</sup>

**Exposure to Chemicals When Food Is Grilled** - Research has shown that women who ate a lot of grilled, barbecued, and smoked meats while consuming very few fruits and vegetables had a higher risk of breast cancer compared to women who didn't eat a lot of grilled meats.<sup>4</sup>

While not everyone with risk factors will develop breast cancer, knowing and understanding these factors may be important to many women, especially those with a family history of breast cancer or who have a family member with a known mutation in a breast cancer susceptibility gene. Empowering your patients to make lifestyle changes, where feasible, and seek out preventive care may help to reduce their cancer risk. Because empowering your patients to understand the value of preventive care is as important to us as it is to you.



For more information on how Labcorp can help you with your preventive care and wellness initiatives, please visit [integratedgenetics.com](https://www.integratedgenetics.com) or contact your local Labcorp representative.

[Download Wellness Brochure](#)

[Download Hereditary Cancer Choices Brochure](#)

## October Health Awareness Calendar

- Breast Cancer Awareness Month
- National Mental Illness Awareness Week (Oct 3-9)
- Child Health Day (Oct 4)
- National Primary Care Week (Oct 4-8)
- World Mental Health Day (Oct 10)
- Pregnancy and Infant Loss Remembrance Day (Oct 15)
- National Health Education Week (Oct 18-22)
- Spina Bifida Awareness Month
- National Down Syndrome Awareness Month



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### References

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