BreastScreen WA Information for Women

Modifiable lifestyle risk factors for breast cancer

There is no proven method of preventing breast cancer. However, there are some lifestyle factors that have been scientifically shown to decrease the risk of breast cancer. Talk to your family doctor if you have any concerns about the points below.

Body weight

- Keeping a healthy weight is important.
- If you are post menopausal, breast cancer risk increases with your increasing weight.

Recommendation: Eat a balanced diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables.

Physical activity

- Women who do regular exercise have a lower risk of developing breast cancer compared with women who do not exercise.

Recommendation: Be active on most, preferably all, days every week and minimise the amount of time spent in prolonged sitting.

Alcohol

- When it comes to cancer risk, there is no safe level of alcohol consumption. Even small amounts of alcohol increase your risk of breast cancer. The more you drink and the more often you drink, the greater your risk.

Recommendation: To reduce your cancer risk, limit how much alcohol you drink or better still, avoid drinking alcohol altogether. If you choose to drink, drink within the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) guidelines.

## Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)

- HRT may be prescribed for the relief of troublesome menopausal symptoms. For these women, the benefits to their quality of life by taking HRT may outweigh the risks.
- Long term (>5 years) use of combined HRT (estrogen and progestogen) increases the risk of breast cancer. Combined HRT may also increase mammographic density which is a risk factor for breast cancer, and can make mammogram interpretation more difficult.
- The risk of breast cancer decreases within five years of stopping HRT, back to the level of women who have never used HRT.

Recommendation: It is important to discuss the use of HRT with your doctor.

References:
BreastScreen Australia Program – www.cancerscreening.gov.au
Cancer Council of Western Australia – www.cancerwa.asn.au
Australian Government - www.alcohol.gov.au
Cancer Australia - www.canceraustralia.gov.au
Australian Menopause Society – www.menopause.org.au

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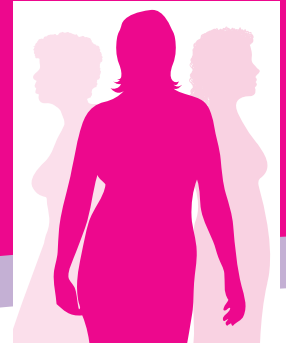
There are some common myths about the risk factors and causes of breast cancer that create anxiety in the community.

Here are some common myths about the causes of breast cancer:

Myth	Truth
Using antiperspirant deodorants.	There is no evidence.
Wearing a tight bra.	There is no evidence.
A bump or knock to the breast.	There is no evidence. However, it can draw attention to an existing lump.
Stress causes breast cancer.	There is no evidence.
Only your mother's family history of breast cancer can affect your risk of breast cancer.	A history of breast cancer in either your mother's or your father's family will influence your risk.
If breast cancer doesn't run in my family, then I won't get it.	Every woman has some risk of breast cancer. Nine out of 10 women who get breast cancer don't have a family history of the disease.
Having a mammogram will prevent breast cancer.	Mammograms (breast X-rays) cannot prevent breast cancer. Mammograms can detect breast cancer early, which increases your chance of successful treatment.
Regular self examinations are the best way to detect breast cancer.	A mammogram is the most reliable way to detect breast cancer at an early stage, however, be aware of changes in your breasts. Ask your GP about breast health at your next check-up.
Breast compression during a mammogram spreads breast cancer.	There is no evidence.
Women need a thyroid shield when having a mammogram.	BreastScreen WA does not have, or need, "thyroid guards" as radiation risk to the thyroid from a mammogram is negligible, as the X-ray beam is narrowly focussed to only target the breast area.

www.breastscreen.health.wa.gov.au

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