

# EDUCATOR TIPS



## Tips for Making Healthy Lifestyle Choices

Living a healthy lifestyle means taking certain steps to lengthen and improve quality of life while reducing your risk of diseases. Healthy lifestyle choices may help lower your risk of different types of cancer, including breast cancer. Healthy living also promotes overall health and protects against other diseases like high blood pressure, heart disease and osteoporosis.

### NOTE

**Not all of the lifestyle behaviors discussed below have been shown in studies to lower risk of breast cancer. Some of these behaviors may lower breast cancer risk in some women, but may not in others. There are risk factors for breast cancer that cannot be controlled, including the two most common — being born a woman and getting older. This resource focuses on some of the things that may be controlled.**

Women who engage in certain behaviors may be more likely to be diagnosed with breast cancer during their lives. Many of these behaviors are under a person's control, which means that women who make healthier lifestyle choices may lower their risk for breast cancer. Some behaviors that may increase breast cancer risk are listed below<sup>1,2</sup>:

- Postmenopausal women who are overweight, obese or living sedentary lifestyles (getting very little exercise) are at an increased risk of breast cancer<sup>3,4</sup>. Limiting weight gain during and after menopause and/or losing weight (for those who are overweight or obese) may help lower risk of developing breast cancer.
- Women who get regular exercise (physical activity) may have a lower risk of breast cancer than women who are inactive. Although not all studies show this benefit, when the evidence is looked at as a whole, regular exercise appears to lower breast cancer risk by about 10 to 20 percent<sup>5</sup>. This benefit is seen most clearly in postmenopausal women<sup>6</sup>.
- Having one or more alcoholic drinks per day is shown to increase both premenopausal and postmenopausal breast cancer. Research data shows that women who had two to three drinks per day had a 20 percent higher risk of breast cancer<sup>2</sup>.

### NOTE

**More research is needed to understand the factors that affect breast cancer risk in Black and African American women.**

It's important to remember that living a healthy lifestyle does not have to be difficult, time-consuming or expensive. Even small changes can help.

**Exercise:** Research has shown that being physically active can reduce the risk of breast cancer both before and after menopause.

- The American Cancer Society recommends 150 minutes (2.5 hours) of physical activity a week to lower overall cancer risk<sup>7</sup>. However, you don't need to have a strenuous exercise routine to get some breast cancer risk reduction benefit. Activity equal to walking 30 minutes a day may lower risk by about three percent<sup>7</sup>.
- Learn if your faith-based organization has a spiritual praise dance group or try some line-dancing classes at your local college, recreation center, restaurant, senior center or YMCA.
- If you can, walk to stores while running errands.
- Some Black and African American women say they shy away from physical exercise because they do not want to undo their hairstyles<sup>8</sup>. If this topic comes up, ask the group for feedback about how they handle this situation in order to offer options to others.
- Ask a friend to exercise with you and help each other stick to your exercise schedule.
- When possible, use the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Park farther away from your destination.
- Take your kids/grandkids or pets for a walk.
- If you work, find ways to exercise at lunch with your coworkers, take breaks to stretch or a quick walk around the office.
- Wear a pedometer (step tracker) every day and increase your daily steps.
- Use a stationary bicycle or treadmill while watching TV.
- Do something you enjoy doing! Exercise does not have to be a chore - you can make it fun!

**Healthy Weight:** Maintaining a healthy weight, especially during and after menopause, may help to reduce your risk of breast cancer. Healthy weight can be defined in several ways. One way is to know your Body Mass Index (BMI). There are calculators online to help you calculate your BMI and weight range (click [here](#) for an example). You can also ask your doctor to help you determine what a healthy weight is for you.

- Eating a healthy diet, including limiting red meat, sugary foods and processed foods, may help you to maintain a healthy weight.
- Limit sweet drinks, including sodas, sports drinks and sweetened teas. Try to drink more unsweetened tea and plain water or seltzer water with fresh fruit cubes.
- Exercise may also help you to maintain your weight. Exercise develops lean muscle, which burns calories.



For more information about the connection between lifestyle and breast cancer risk and sample talking points, see [Key Messages: Make Healthy Lifestyle Choices](#).

**Meal Preparation:** Try the following tips for eating a healthy and well-balanced diet.

- Try braising, poaching, stewing, microwaving, baking or roasting meats instead of frying. If you want to fry your food, pan-fry meats using trans-fat-free oils (palm, almond, olive) instead of lard or shortening.
- Eat more fish, poultry or beans as an alternative to red meat.
- If you eat red meat, select lean cuts and eat smaller portions.
- Adopt traditions that will help you eat less red meat, such as participating in “Meatless Monday,” which encourages people to cut meat out of their diet at least one day per week.
- Eat more fruits and healthy sources of dietary fiber. Fruit juice does not contain fiber, which is an important part of your diet and can help you to feel full for longer. You can even make your own smoothies with fruit and vegetables.
- Integrate traditional vegetables like okra, yams, sweet potatoes, black-eyed peas and collard and mustard greens into daily meals. These foods are high in vitamins and nutrients. Prepare these vegetables using oil instead of butter, reduce the amount of sugar and use one percent or fat-free milk. You can even try preparing other types of greens, like spinach, green beans and broccoli as you would collards.
- Use the [\*Recipe Search Tool\*](#) to find healthy recipes using your favorite ingredients.

**Alcohol:** Studies show that drinking alcohol (just one drink of alcohol per day) increases breast cancer risk. Limiting your alcohol use may reduce risk.

- Limit alcohol intake to less than one drink a day for women and fewer than two drinks a day for men. One drink is defined as 5 ounces of wine, 12 ounces of beer, or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof liquor.

**Breastfeed:** Breastfeeding is associated with a lower risk of breast cancer, including triple negative breast cancers. If you have children in the future, breastfeeding them may help to lower your risk of breast cancer.

- There is evidence that mothers who breastfed for a lifetime total (combined duration of breastfeeding for all children) of one year were slightly less likely to get breast cancer than those who never breastfed. Mothers who breastfed for a lifetime total of two years got about twice the benefit of those who breastfed for a total of one year. Mothers who breastfed for a lifetime total of more than two years got even more benefit<sup>9</sup>. Although data are limited, breastfeeding for less than one year may also modestly lower breast cancer risk<sup>9</sup>.
- Breastfeed future babies, if you can.

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