To prevent new cancers from starting, scientists look at risk factors and protective factors. Anything that increases your chance of developing cancer is called a cancer risk factor; anything that decreases your chance of developing cancer is called a cancer protective factor.

### Risk Factors
- Estrogen
- Hormone replacement
- Radiation therapy to the chest
- Being overweight or obese after menopause
- Lack of physical activity
- Drinking alcohol
- Inherited Risk

### Protective Factors

**Exercise**: Exercising four or more hours a week may decrease hormone levels.

**Estrogen**: Decreasing the length of time a woman’s breast tissue is exposed to estrogen may help prevent breast cancer. Exposure to estrogen is reduced in the following ways:

- **Pregnancy**: Estrogen levels are lower during pregnancy.
- **Breast Feeding**: Estrogen levels remain low while a woman is breast feeding.
- **Ovarian ablation**: Removal of one or more of the ovaries which make estrogen.
- **Late menstruation**: Menstrual periods at age 14 or older.
- **Early menopause**: Estrogen levels decrease with menopause.

**Selective estrogen receptor modulators** are drugs that act like estrogen on some tissues in the body, but block the effect of estrogen on other tissues.

**Prophylactic mastectomy**: The removal of both breasts when there are no signs of cancer.

**Prophylactic oophorectomy**: The removal of both ovaries when there are no signs of cancer.

**Fenretinide**: A type of vitamin A called a retinoid. When given to premenopausal women who have a history of breast cancer, fenretinide may lower the risk of forming a new breast cancer.

### What you should do

**Screening mammogram**: Women in their 40s and older should have mammograms every 1 to 2 years.

**Clinical Breast Exams**: During a clinical breast exam, your health care provider checks your breasts.