

# Breast Cancer Screening for High-Risk Women



## What is my risk for breast cancer?

All women are at risk for breast cancer, but not all women have the same risk. Experts use a woman's personal and family medical histories, genetic tests, lifestyle and exposures, and other factors to assess risk and make recommendations for breast screening and risk management.

**Very high-risk women** have a 30% or greater lifetime risk of breast cancer. This group includes women with:

- known mutations in a BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene or mutations associated with other hereditary cancer syndromes including Li-Fraumeni Syndrome and Cowden Syndrome.

**Intermediate-risk women** have a lifetime risk of breast cancer that is higher than the average woman but less than 30%. This group includes women with:

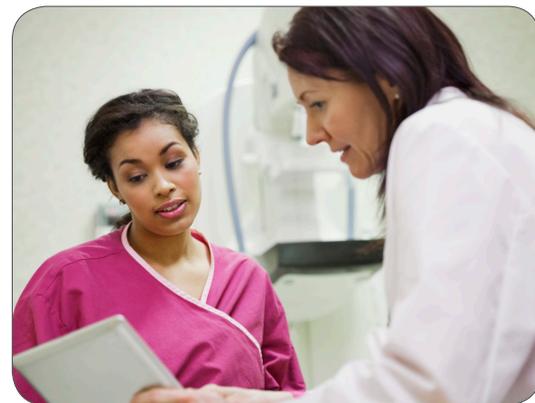
- a breast biopsy that shows changes such as atypical ductal or lobular hyperplasia, or Lobular Carcinoma In Situ (LCIS)
- a calculated risk of breast cancer that is 20% to 29% based upon family history, personal health history, or certain genetic markers

**Average-risk women** with none of the above risk factors have a 10-13% lifetime risk of breast cancer.

**Important!** To understand your risk for breast cancer and the actions you can take to manage it, consult with medical experts who have advanced training in risk assessment and cancer genetics.

## What techniques are used to find breast cancer?

- All women should be familiar with the look and feel of their breast so they can report any changes or lumps to their doctors.
- Mammograms are most often used to screen women for breast cancer.
- Breast magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is a very sensitive tool used to screen high-risk women.
- Ultrasound is not typically recommended for screening, but it is sometimes used to see if breast changes are solid masses or fluid-filled cysts, or to screen high-risk women who are pregnant for whom mammograms and MRI may not be safe.
- Experts also use these tools along with biopsies to follow up on breast changes or lumps.



## What type of screening do I need?

Experts have developed breast screening guidelines based on a woman's risk.

### Breast screening for average-risk women

- annual mammogram beginning at age 40
- breast exam by a health care provider every 3 years for women in their 20s and 30s, and every year for women age 40 and over
- women should know how their breasts normally look and feel, and report any breast change promptly to their health care provider

### Breast screening for intermediate-risk women

- discuss increased and/or earlier screening, including MRI, with their physicians

### Breast screening for very high-risk women

- breast awareness or breast self exam starting at age 18
- clinical breast exam by a health care expert once or twice yearly starting by age 25
- annual mammogram starting at age 25-30 or earlier based on age of breast cancer diagnosis of family members
- annual breast magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) starting at age 25 or earlier based on age of breast cancer diagnosis of family members

These recommendations start at a slightly younger age for women with Li-Fraumeni Syndrome, and a slighter older age for women with Cowden Syndrome.

## What are my other options?

Breast screening can find cancers earlier when they are more treatable but does not guarantee that breast cancers will be found before they have spread. High-risk women should also discuss these risk-reducing options with their doctors:

- Risk-reducing mastectomy: Surgical removal of the breasts can lower the risk for breast cancer by as much as 95% in high-risk women.
- Risk-reducing salpingo-oophorectomy: Surgical removal of the ovaries and fallopian tubes can lower the risk for breast cancer by up to 30-50% in high-risk women.
- Chemoprevention: Tamoxifen and raloxifene are FDA-approved to lower risk of breast cancer in high-risk and intermediate-risk women. Some experts also recommend exemestane (Aromasin®) for their high-risk patients.

High-risk women may consider participating in research studies that look for other ways to lower risk for breast cancer or detect it early. You can visit the FORCE website for links to studies enrolling high-risk women.

## Where can I get more information?

Experts in cancer genetics can help you and your family understand your cancer risk. Women at high risk for breast cancer should seek out an imaging facility that includes:

- Digital mammography
- A dedicated breast MRI machine
- Radiologists who are experienced in imaging young or high-risk women

To find an expert in your area, or to receive support and information, visit [www.facingourrisk.org](http://www.facingourrisk.org) or call our peer support helpline at 866-288-RISK (7475).



Fighting Hereditary Breast and Ovarian Cancer