

Be Safer

Living with a Breast Cancer Diagnosis

There are many factors that affect your risk of a breast cancer diagnosis, recurrence, secondary primary cancers, and the likelihood that cancer will spread. These factors include exposures to toxics in our environment as well as commonly known lifestyle factors.

Every day, people ask us what toxic exposures to avoid. While we have advice for you below, we know that not everyone can follow it. There are systemic barriers to our ability to access healthy foods; exercise as much as we would like; purchase affordable, safe products; and live in communities free of industrial or other sources of pollution.

That's why our first top tip is to join us at BCPP in changing the game – let's change the system to make the healthy choice the easy choice for everyone.

Change the game

Get involved.

For 20+ years we've worked to change policies at local, state and federal levels to remove toxic exposures from our environment. We also hold corporations responsible for the chemicals in their products and advocate for transparency to help reduce our exposures. Get involved in our prevention advocacy efforts by visiting bcpp.org/take-action!

Home & Shopping

Clean green.

Use an air purifier, vacuum with a HEPA filter, and dust with a wet cloth to avoid the chemicals that collect in house dust, like toxic flame retardants in old furniture.

Chose non-vinyl shower curtains.

Vinyl curtains contain phthalates, chemicals that are endocrine disrupting compounds and linked to higher risk of breast cancer related mortality. Shower curtains with natural fibers like cotton, birch, bamboo, linen, or hemp; a glass partition; or synthetics like polyester are safer.

Avoid cadmium.

Exposure to cadmium may speed metastasis of cancer to sites distant from the breast. Avoid cadmium in: makeup, especially dense color cosmetics, metal jewelry, especially inexpensive/costume jewelry, foods like liver, kidney, and root vegetables grown in contaminated soil.

Avoid 'fragrance.'

Products that list the word 'fragrance' can contain phthalates and many other chemicals, some of which are known carcinogens or endocrine disruptors.

Avoid pesticides.

Choose organic as much as possible, especially for fruits and veggies. Data on now-banned pesticides suggests links to cancer, and current pesticides share similar chemicals properties.

Reproductive factors

Breastfeed if you can.

If you are able to have children after treatment, breastfeeding is protective against later disease for both mother and child.

Avoid hormone replacement therapies.

Currently, there is not enough research to know whether HRT is safe for women who have been treated for breast cancer. If you and your medical team feel that taking HRT will improve your well-being, use the supplements for as short a period as is possible.

Sleep & Shift work

Sleep in the dark.

Research has shown that night shift work and sleep disruption may affect breast cancer mortality. Try to ensure your sleep area is as dark as possible – especially if you are a shift worker. Limit light in the evening from phones and electronics, including alarm clocks. Sleep with an eye mask or light-blocking curtains, especially if you sleep during the day.

Try to get restful sleep.

Sleep disturbance can be caused by medication side effects or the stress of treatment and your health. Speak to your doctor, therapist, or support group if you're not sleeping soundly.

Healthy living

Try to maintain a healthy weight.

There is increasing evidence that obesity increases the risk of recurrence and mortality after a diagnosis of breast cancer. It also increases the risk of other chronic diseases that often co-exist with a breast cancer diagnosis such as cardiovascular disease and worsens health-related quality-of-life.

Eat as fresh and healthy a diet as possible.

As much as you are able, choose a healthy pattern that avoids sugary drinks and emphasizes whole grains, vegetables, fruit, and beans, minimizes red and processed meat, fast foods and other processed foods high in fat, starches or sugars.

Reduce alcohol consumption.

Evidence suggests it is best to not drink at all, but reducing consumption also has benefits.

Maintain physical activity as much as possible.

While it may be difficult to maintain physical activity during and, sometimes, after breast cancer treatment, any activity you can do is helpful.

Consider your soy intake.

If you are post-menopausal, soy consumption as part of your regular diet (not a supplement) may protect against recurrence (evidence is mixed for pre-menopausal women). However, if you are on tamoxifen or other anti-estrogenic treatments, avoid soy, as it contains naturally occurring estrogenic substances.

Quit smoking and avoid 2nd hand smoke.

Quit smoking and avoid second-hand smoke including from wood-burning fireplaces and charcoal grills to avoid PAH's (polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons) and other known carcinogens. Smoking has been linked to increased risk of recurrence and mortality.

Boost vitamin D.

Get sunshine and eat foods high in Vitamin D. Higher blood levels of vitamin D have been associated with better survival.

Breast Cancer Prevention Partners (BCPP) is the leading science-based policy and advocacy organization working to prevent breast cancer by eliminating our exposure to toxic chemicals.

Visit: bcpp.org to learn more and join our community!

Follow online to get tips, policy and science updates, and relevant news to keep your family informed and safe:



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