

Men and Breast Cancer: Risk Factors



It isn't always clear why men develop breast cancer. But experts know that certain risk factors can play a role.

Gender words are used here to talk about anatomy and health risk. Please use this information in a way that works best for you and your provider as you talk about your care.

What is a risk factor?

A risk factor is anything that increases the chance of getting a disease. Risk factors can be things that are out of your control, like age, race, and your family's health history. Or they can be lifestyle habits you can change, such as drinking alcohol.

Who is at risk for male breast cancer?

Below are 6 risk factors linked to male breast cancer. If you have 1 or more, it doesn't mean you will definitely get the disease. But it does make a diagnosis more likely. That's why awareness is so important. Knowing your risk factors lets you make better choices about your health.

Age

Breast cancer can happen at any age. But the risk for male breast cancer increases over time. It usually occurs in men older than age 60.

Family history of breast cancer

Your risk is higher if any family members have had breast cancer. About 20% of men with breast cancer have a close relative with the disease.

Genetic mutations

Male breast cancer is sometimes linked to inherited gene mutations. Genes give cells information about how to grow and behave. But if there's a mutation, it can lead to problems.

BRCA1 and BRCA2 mutations are the most common ones linked with breast cancer. Others that can raise risk are mutations in the CHEK2 and PALB2 genes. If cancer runs in your family, your healthcare provider may advise tests to look for these mutated genes.

High estrogen levels

Everyone has estrogen in their body. But when men have too much of this hormone, it can raise the risk for breast cancer. Several factors can lead to a rise in estrogen levels, including:

- **Body weight.** Carrying extra weight can result in an excess of estrogen. That's because fat cells convert androgens (male hormones) into estrogens.
- **Liver disease.** A healthy liver is crucial for hormone balance. Liver disease can raise estrogen levels and lower androgen levels.
- **Alcohol.** Heavy drinking can damage the liver, which then increases estrogen levels.
- **Estrogen treatment.** Estrogen medicines were once used to treat prostate cancer. If you have a history of this treatment, you may have a higher risk for breast cancer.

- **Some testicular conditions.** Having injured, swollen, inflamed, or undescended testicles may affect hormone production.
- **Orchiectomy.** Surgery to remove 1 or both testicles may lead to high estrogen levels.

Radiation exposure

If you've had radiation therapy to the chest, you have a higher risk of developing breast cancer.

Klinefelter syndrome

Klinefelter syndrome is a rare genetic condition. It affects about 1 in 1,000 men. Usually, males are born with 1 X chromosome and 1 Y chromosome. But with Klinefelter syndrome, males have 1 Y chromosome plus at least 2 X chromosomes.

This condition changes the body's balance of estrogen and androgen, which can be a factor for developing cancer. Men with this syndrome are between 20 to 60 times more likely to get breast cancer than men without it.

What are your risk factors?

Understanding these risk factors is the first step. But what's most important is knowing if and how they affect you. Don't hesitate to talk about your concerns with your provider. They can offer insight and suggest ways to be proactive in managing your health.

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