

Who Gets Breast Cancer?

What Can Make Your Risk for Breast Cancer Go Up?

What Can Make Your Risk for Breast Cancer Go Down?

How Much Does Your Risk Change?

Absolute Risk and Relative Risk

Understanding Breast Cancer Risk

Who Gets Breast Cancer?

All women are at risk for getting breast cancer. As you get older, your risk increases. Assuming you live to age 90, your risk of getting breast cancer over your lifetime is about 12%.

Does that sound like a BIG risk? It might sound scary, because it means that an average of about **one out of every 8 women will get breast cancer** in the course of a 90-year life span.

You can also look at it another way: A 12% risk means there's an **88% chance that you won't get breast cancer**.

What Can Make Your Risk for Breast Cancer Go Down?

- Eating a healthy diet
- Losing extra weight
- Regular exercise
- Reducing alcohol use
- Quitting smoking
- Minimizing/eliminating extra estrogen
- Preventive measures for high risk (surgery, medication)

What Can Make Your Risk for Breast Cancer Go Up?

- Personal or family history of breast cancer
- Smoking
- Excessive weight
- Prolonged estrogen exposure
- Abnormal breast cell growth
- First full-term pregnancy after age 30
- Never having a full-term pregnancy
- Heavy alcohol use
- Early start of menstruation
- Late menopause

88%

12%

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continued ▶

How much does your risk change?

Knowing what can **increase** or **decrease** your risk for breast cancer is important. But you probably want to know just HOW MUCH those factors change your risk.

If you hear that a certain treatment can reduce your risk by 40%, what does that mean?

To understand what the numbers mean about **YOUR** risk for breast cancer, the key terms to know are **Relative Risk** and **Absolute Risk**.

Relative Risk is the number that tells you how much something you do, like taking a pill, can change your risk, compared to your risk without taking a pill.

Absolute Risk is the number of percentage points by which your own risk changes if you do something, like taking a pill. The size of your absolute risk depends on what your risk is to begin with.

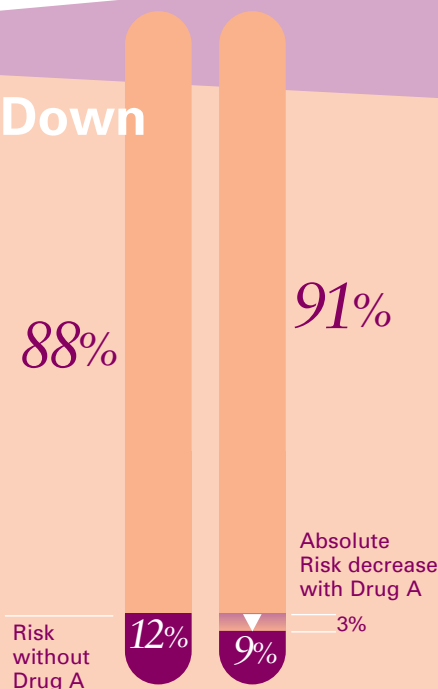
Example of Risk Going Down

Suppose your risk of breast cancer is 12%, and then you decide to take Drug A, which can lower the risk of breast cancer by 25%.

That means your risk of breast cancer with Drug A could be 25% lower than without Drug A. That's the **Relative Risk** decrease with Drug A.

But how big a difference does a 25% decrease really mean for you? Lowering your 12% risk by 25% drops your risk by 3%.

That 3% is the **Absolute Risk** decrease for YOU, leaving you with a risk of 9%, if you take Drug A.



Example of Risk Going Up

Suppose your risk of breast cancer is 12%, and you want to take Drug B to help with a different health problem. But Drug B might increase your risk of breast cancer by 40%. That's the **Relative Risk** increase with Drug B.

How much of a difference does a 40% increase really mean for you? Increasing your 12% risk by 40% raises your risk by a total of 4.8%.

That's the **Absolute Risk** increase for YOU, leaving you with a risk of 16.8%, if you take Drug B.



Making the Right Decisions for YOU

Knowing how much your breast cancer risk changes with treatment can help you and your doctor make the best decisions for YOU.

Developed for you by

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A nonprofit organization dedicated to bringing you the most complete, reliable, and up-to-date medical and personal information about breast cancer.