



# Triple-negative Breast Cancer

Breast cancer starts when cells in the breast grow out of control. It can start in one or both breasts. It's much more common in women, but men get breast cancer, too.

**Triple-negative breast cancer (TNBC)** is a kind of breast cancer that grows and spreads quickly. So, it's important to find it early and treat it as soon as possible.

## What is TNBC?

After a breast cancer diagnosis, doctors check the cancer cells for certain proteins. If the cells don't have estrogen or progesterone receptors (ER or PR), and they make little to none of the HER2 protein, the cancer is called triple-negative. About 1 in 10 of all breast cancers are TNBC.

## How is TNBC different from other breast cancers?

TNBC tends to grow and spread faster than other kinds of breast cancer. It's also more likely to have spread at the time it's found and come back after treatment.

Since TNBC doesn't have hormone receptors or much HER2, it has fewer treatment options. Hormone therapy and medicines that target HER2 aren't helpful.

## Who is at risk for TNBC?

Anyone can get TNBC, but some things can increase a person's risk.

- TNBC is more common in women younger than age 40.
- About 1 in 5 women with TNBC have an inherited gene change (such as *BRCA1* or *BRCA2* genes).
- TNBC is more common in women who haven't gone through menopause yet.
- Black and Hispanic women are more likely to get TNBC than women of other ethnicities.

## Can I help reduce my breast cancer risk?

Some breast cancers might be prevented with lifestyle changes. **Here are some things you can do to help lower your risk for breast cancer:**

- **It's best not to drink alcohol.** The risk for breast cancer increases as you drink more alcohol.
- **Be as active as possible.** Aim for 2½ to five hours of activity each week. If you aren't active now, start slowly and build up over time.
- **Get to and stay at a healthy weight.** Excess body weight can increase your risk of breast cancer. Ask your doctor what a healthy weight is for you.
- **If you take or are thinking about taking hormone therapy,** talk with your doctor about the risks and benefits.
- **Breastfeeding** can help lower your risk for getting breast cancer.
- **Know your family history.** The risk of breast cancer is higher for women with a relative who has had breast cancer. The risk is even higher if you have a close relative (mother, sister, or daughter) who has or had it. If you have a family history, your doctor may have you see a genetic counselor.



## What breast cancer screening tests do I need?

Screening is a process used to look for cancer in people who don't have symptoms. The earlier breast cancer is found – when it's small and hasn't spread – means treatment is more likely to be successful.

**The American Cancer Society recommends the following for finding breast cancer early in women at average risk:**

- **Women between 40 to 44** have the option to start screening with a mammogram (x-rays of the breast) every year.
- **Women 45 to 54** should get a mammogram every year.
- **Women 55 and older** can switch to a mammogram every other year, or they can choose to continue yearly screening. Screening should continue as long as a woman is in good health and is expected to live at least 10 more years.

- If you are getting a mammogram, ask what you can expect and what the test can and cannot do.
- You should also know how your breasts normally look and feel and report any changes to your doctor right away.
- Screening MRI and screening mammograms might be recommended for certain women at high risk of breast cancer. Talk with your doctor for more information.

Black women have higher rates of breast cancer overall, higher rates of TNBC, and a higher risk of death from breast cancer.

**Yet, Black women are less likely to be referred for breast cancer genetic testing than White women.**

## What are the signs and symptoms of breast cancer?

The signs (things you can see) and symptoms (things you feel – like pain) for TNBC are the same as for other breast cancers.

The most common symptom of breast cancer is a **new lump in your breast**. While most lumps aren't cancer, it's important to have a doctor check them.

**Other signs of breast cancer can include:**

- Swelling of all or part of a breast (even if you don't feel a lump)
- Skin dimpling (sometimes looks like an orange peel)
- Nipple pain or retraction (turning inward)
- Nipple discharge (other than breast milk)
- Nipple or breast skin that is red, dry, flaking, or thickened
- Lumps under the arm or near the collarbone



To learn more about triple-negative breast cancer, visit the American Cancer Society website at [cancer.org/breastcancer](https://cancer.org/breastcancer) or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.

