

## Who gets breast cancer?

If you are a woman, you already have the leading risk factor for getting breast cancer — just being a woman. And as you grow older, you have the number two risk factor — increasing age. Simply being a woman and getting older increase your chances of developing breast cancer.

## Is there an increased risk?

Lesbian, gay, bisexual women and transgender people have a greater risk of breast cancer than other women. The risk is not because of their sexual orientation. Rather, it is because some risk factors for breast cancer and barriers for breast cancer detection — never having children and not seeing a doctor on a regular basis — occur more often in these populations.

For many heterosexual women, reproductive health issues are their main link to the health care system. When seeing a doctor about reproductive health, breast health is often addressed, including clinical breast exams and mammograms. Because lesbian, gay and bisexual women may not have children, they may seek routine reproductive health care less often, leading to fewer chances to have screening tests. Some people may also avoid or delay visiting a health care provider because they are afraid of being treated poorly due to their sexual orientation. As a result, breast cancer may not be found as early as possible.

Transgender persons are also at risk for developing breast cancer. Anyone who has had surgery to remove breast tissue is still at risk for breast cancer. Breast



*Seeing a health care provider on a regular basis for clinical breast exams and mammograms are important for early detection.*

screening recommendations are the same for female-to-male (FTM) transpeople. There are currently no screening recommendations for male-to-female (MTF) transpeople, but any change in the look and feel of the breasts should be reported to a health care provider.

When cancer is found at an early stage, it can often be treated successfully. One step people can take is to find a health care provider who is sensitive to their health issues and to be seen on a *regular* basis — especially for clinical breast exams and mammograms. The resources on the back side of this fact sheet can help.

## So what can I do?

There are many things you can do for yourself, such as:

- Choose a health care provider who makes you feel comfortable.
- Know your risk by learning about your family health history and talking to your health care provider about your own personal risk.
- Ask your doctor which screening tests are right for you if you are at a higher risk. Have a mammogram every year starting at age 40 if you are at average risk. Have a clinical breast exam at least every 3 years starting at age 20, and every year starting at age 40.
- Know how your breasts normally look and feel and report any changes to your health care provider.
- Make healthy lifestyle choices such as maintaining a healthy weight, getting regular exercise, limiting alcohol intake and postmenopausal hormones.
- Contact an organization about lesbian and gay health issues.

## Resources

Susan G. Komen for the Cure® — promises to save lives and end breast cancer forever by empowering people, ensuring quality of care for all and energizing science to find the cures.

1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636),  
[www.komen.org](http://www.komen.org)

Gay and Lesbian Medical Association — works to bring about equality in healthcare for LGBT people.  
202-600-8037, [www.glma.org](http://www.glma.org)

Lesbian Health and Research Center — dedicated to improving the health of lesbians, bisexual women, transgender people and their families.  
415-502-5209, [www.lesbianhealthinfo.org](http://www.lesbianhealthinfo.org)

Mautner Project, The National Lesbian Health Organization — works to improve the health of lesbians and their families through direct and support services, education and advocacy.  
1-866-MAUTNER (628-8637),  
[www.mautnerproject.org](http://www.mautnerproject.org)

National LGBT Cancer Network — addresses the needs of all LGBT people with cancer and those at risk.  
212-675-2633, [www.cancer-network.org](http://www.cancer-network.org)

The National Coalition for LGBT Health — committed to improving health through public education, coalition building and advocacy that focus on research, policy, education and training.  
202-558-6826, [www.LGBThealth.net](http://www.LGBThealth.net)

### Related fact sheets in this series:

- Breast Cancer Risk Factors
- Healthy Living
- Talking With Your Doctor

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