

Facts about breast cancer in Alberta

Breast cancer is the most common type of cancer diagnosed in women (excluding non-melanoma skin cancer). In 2000, there were 1,651 new invasive cases of breast cancer among women in Alberta. For 2003, it was estimated that 1,850 Alberta women would be diagnosed with breast cancer and 430 would die from the disease.

likely a factor in this decrease and continues to be the most effective tool for reducing breast cancer deaths.

Alberta's rates of breast cancer incidence and mortality are close to the Canadian rates.

A woman's probability of developing breast cancer in the next five years

At age 30	1 in 667
At age 40	1 in 208
At age 50	1 in 108
At age 60	1 in 78
At age 70	1 in 65

Estimated age-standardized mortality rates per 100,000 women, 2003

Canada	25
British Columbia	23
ALBERTA	25
Saskatchewan	22
Manitoba	29
Ontario	25
Quebec	27
New Brunswick	27
Nova Scotia	32
Prince Edward Island	28
Newfoundland	27

Source: National Cancer Institute

Incidence rates (new cases) for breast cancer in Alberta have been gradually increasing for many years. The reason for this trend is not yet known. At the same time, mortality rates (deaths) due to breast cancer are gradually decreasing. Screening mammography is

What causes breast cancer?

Although the cause of breast cancer is unknown, certain factors increase the risk of developing it:

Major risk factors

◆ **Being female:** men can develop breast cancer too, but it is rare. There were 11 new cases in Alberta males in 2000.

◆ **Age:** over 80 per cent of women diagnosed with breast cancer are over 50 years old.

◆ **Family history:** having a mother or sister diagnosed with breast cancer increases a woman's risk of developing breast cancer, but 80 per cent of women who have breast cancer have no family history of it.

◆ **Being born in North America or Europe:** breast cancer rates are lower in underdeveloped countries than in industrialized ones.

Lesser risks:

- ◆ Having no pregnancies or having a first pregnancy after age 30
- ◆ Menstruating earlier than age 12
- ◆ Beginning menopause later than average
- ◆ Using hormone replacement therapy (estrogen plus progestin)
- ◆ Irradiation to chest as a child
- ◆ Previous diagnosis of breast cancer

Research also suggests that a poor diet, lack of exercise, obesity and excessive alcohol use may increase the risk of breast cancer. The possibility that smoking contributes to breast cancer risk is being studied.

Research into the relationship between environmental factors such as chemicals and other pollutants and breast cancer is ongoing, but so far has not proven a connection.



WIT ANDRUSCHAK

Heather Webber, centre, with husband Len, and daughters Jaime, left, Lauren, front left and Kelly, right, is another breast cancer survivor. She went through nine months of treatment including chemotherapy, surgery and radiation. Webber strongly advises women to take immediate action if they have reason to think something has changed in their breasts. "If I had any advice for women it would be "do not even fool around with it."

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Risk Reduction

The major risks of breast cancer (age, gender) cannot be modified. There is evidence, though that a healthy lifestyle may reduce the risk of breast cancer. Regular exercise appears to be especially important: studies have shown that women over 50 who exercise regularly have a reduced incidence of breast cancer.

Signs and symptoms of breast cancer

The following signs and symptoms do not necessarily mean that you have breast cancer, but if you notice any of them, you should see your doctor right away.

- ◆ New lump in breast or armpit
- ◆ Nipple turned inward (if it is not usually turned inward)
- ◆ Crusting, bleeding or a rash on nipple
- ◆ Nipple discharge
- ◆ Dimpling or thickening of skin in one area of breast

Early Detection

Women of all ages should have a clinical breast exam done by a trained health practitioner every year. They should also be familiar with their bodies so that they can tell when there is an unusual change in their breasts. If a woman finds an unusual change in her breast, she should report it to her physician right away. Women aged 50 to 69 should also have a breast X-ray (mammogram) every two years. Women 40 to 49 who choose to have a mammogram should do so annually, although the denser breast tissue in women this age makes cancers harder to see on an X-ray. Mammography is not recommended for women under 40 years of age. If you are 40 to 69 years of age and are due for a screening mammogram, we invite you to contact Screen Test at Calgary (403) 355-3232, Edmonton (780) 474-4300 or mobile screen clinic 1-800-667-0604.

Breast Screening Life Plan

If you are 20-39

- ◆ Become familiar with how your breasts look and feel and be able to recognize monthly breast changes.
- ◆ See your doctor regularly for a periodic health exam.

If you are 40-49

- ◆ Have a clinical breast exam by a trained health professional every year.
- ◆ Discuss your risk of breast cancer and the risks and benefits of mammography with your doctor.
- ◆ Check your breast regularly for changes.

If you are 50-69

- ◆ Have a clinical breast examination by a trained health professional every year.
- ◆ Have a screening mammogram every two years.
- ◆ Check your breasts regularly for changes.

If you are 70 or over

- ◆ Have a clinical breast examination by a trained professional every year.
- ◆ Talk to your doctor about whether you should have regular mammograms.
- ◆ Check your breasts regularly for changes.