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Canadian
Breast Cancer
Foundation
Ontario Chapter



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

for Peer Educators
and their Audience



Breast Cancer.

You *can* do something about it.



WHY DO WE NEED TO THINK ABOUT BREAST CANCER NOW WHILE WE'RE YOUNG?



Research is now showing a clear link between lifestyle factors (alcohol and healthy eating and physical activity) and the risk for breast cancer. Research also shows that during the teenage years, girls tend to decrease their involvement in sports and other kinds of physical activity, eat in a less healthy way and begin to experiment with alcohol and binge drinking.

At this stage of your life you are more in control of your eating, activity and drinking choices than when you were younger. But you also have to navigate your choices in an environment where there are pressures to eat junk food, diet and drink alcohol in social situations. There are many commitments competing for your time – school, jobs, friends, family responsibilities, for example – and finding time for physical activity can be a challenge. The patterns you develop now around alcohol use, physical activity and healthy eating will likely continue as you get older.

If the patterns you develop now incorporate lower-risk lifestyles, these healthy patterns will likely continue throughout your life.

Not only will a commitment to a healthy lifestyle help to reduce your risks for breast cancer, but it will also help to reduce the risks for a whole range of other diseases. It's kind of like a savings account for health.

Q₂

HOW MANY WOMEN GET BREAST CANCER WHEN THEY ARE YOUNG?



Let's start with the number of women of all ages who get breast cancer in Canada, where it is the most common type of cancer for women. More than 22,000 women are diagnosed each year – one in nine women in Canada. Fortunately 2 out of 3 of the women diagnosed with breast cancer will live through it, largely due to advances in screening and treatment.

Although the incidence of breast cancer rises sharply with age (the older you are, the higher the risk you will get it), breast cancer is the most common type of cancer affecting young adults. The incidence of breast cancer in women under the age of 40 represents only about 4% of all breast cancer cases. And the incidence rate of breast cancer in this age range has declined slightly.

Breast cancer rarely occurs in men (less than 1% of all cases).

[Information from: Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation, National Cancer Institute of Canada and Cancer in Young Adults in Canada, Canadian Cancer Society, 2006.]

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Q3

HOW MUCH MORE
OF A RISK DO I
HAVE IF A FAMILY
MEMBER HAS
BREAST CANCER?



Risks for breast cancer fall into two types – those we can control or change (modifiable risks) and those we can't (non-modifiable risks).

Family history and genetics are two risk factors over which you have no control. Other non-modifiable risk factors include aging and being a woman.

If you have a close family member like a mother or sister with breast cancer, you have an increased risk for developing it yourself.

About 5-10% of breast cancers are related to heredity, or genetic make-up. There are two genes in our bodies (BRCA1 and BRCA2) which have been identified as helping to control the growth of cancer cells. When a person has an inherited mutation to one of these genes, there is a greater risk that they will develop breast cancer.

If you have a family history of breast cancer or carry the genetic mutation which increases your risk, knowing how to reduce your lifestyle-related risks may be particularly important.

But we still don't know enough to say who will get breast cancer and who will not. It remains one of the most challenging things about this disease.

(Information from: Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation)

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Q4

SHOULD WE BE EXAMINING OUR BREASTS?



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Breasts come in all sizes, shapes and colors. It is normal for one breast to be different than the other; breasts can change size and/or feel depending on such factors as the menstruation cycle, weight loss or weight gain.

Rethink Breast Cancer is an organization dedicated to helping young women address issues related to breast cancer. They offer a simple, effective way of thinking about breast awareness. See:

TLC is an important message for all women and simply asks that women show their breasts some TLC:

TOUCH your breasts. Feel for anything unusual.

LOOK for changes. Be aware of their shape and texture.

CHECK anything unusual with your doctor. Chat with someone you trust if you are worried.

There is no need to follow a fancy routine for examining your breasts, just be familiar with how they look and feel so that you notice changes. You can do this by looking and feeling in any way that makes you feel comfortable – in the bath or shower, when dressing, standing or lying down.

Women should be aware of how their breasts normally look and feel, and report any breast change promptly to their health care provider.

(Information from: Rethink Breast Cancer)



Q5

WHAT ABOUT
THE RISK OF
SMOKING AND
BREAST CANCER?



The research on tobacco smoke and breast cancer has shown different results, depending on women's age and stage of life. However, there is growing research indicating that tobacco use may have an impact on the increased risk of breast cancer. Both active smoking and passive smoking (being around someone who smokes) may increase your risk of this disease. The strongest evidence available concerns increased risk for women who begin smoking or are exposed to second-hand smoke during adolescence and before a full-term pregnancy.

(Information from: Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation)

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Q6

SHOULD I BE WORRIED ABOUT USING THE BIRTH CONTROL PILL/PATCH?



The birth control pill (“oral contraceptives”) or contraceptive patch can lead to a small increase in the risk for breast cancer.

The good news is that when a woman stops taking the pill, her risk for breast cancer drops, over a period of several years, to approximately what it was before using the pill. There have been different formulations of the pill over the years, so the effects of different pills can vary.

Discussing the benefits and risks with a doctor can help you decide if oral contraceptives are right for you.

(Information from: Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation)

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Q7

ISN'T THE ENVIRONMENT FULL OF CANCER CAUSING AGENTS – LIKE PESTICIDES AND PLASTIC BOTTLES?



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People are exposed to thousands of natural and synthetic chemicals every day. We come into contact with chemicals by breathing the air, eating and drinking, and from touching natural and manufactured objects. But we don't all get cancer.

Our knowledge of which chemicals found in our environment can cause breast cancer is not complete. Certain types of chemicals such as solvents, pesticides, pharmaceutical drugs, additives in food and in gasoline, and some chemicals used in industry and manufacturing have been studied but more research is needed to confirm which chemicals may increase the risk of breast cancer.

The ways in which chemicals may cause breast cancer are not yet well understood. It could be how often we come into contact with the chemical or when in our lifetime this occurs.

There are numerous environmental contaminants that the Canadian Cancer Society recommends minimizing exposure to. One that has recently received attention is Bisphenol A or BPA – the chemical found in many plastic bottles and cans. Under the Government of Canada's Chemical Management Plan, a ban was placed on the importation, sale and advertising of baby bottles made with BPA.

(Information from: Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation and Canadian Cancer Society)



Q8

HOW STRONG IS THE RESEARCH TO PROVE THE LINKS BETWEEN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, ALCOHOL AND DIET WITH BREAST CANCER?



The research we have is from studies completed in the last 3-5 years that have been rigorously reviewed and published in reputable journals. Our references are sources like the Canadian Cancer Society, the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation, the National Cancer Institute of Canada and Cancer Care Ontario as well as several international sources.

In some cases the evidence is considered “suggestive” or “probable” and more studies have to be done to more clearly establish a linkage and a clear explanation for the study results. Interestingly, the evidence linking alcohol to increased risk for breast cancer is considered “convincing” – the very highest level of judgement from the scientific community.

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MAKE THIS SIMPLE –
WHAT CAN I DO TO
REDUCE MY RISK?



There are three easy ways to reduce three of the modifiable risks for breast cancer:

Eat smart.

Get physical.

Limit the alcohol.

For example:

1. If you are not already doing so, increase your vegetables and fruit to 7 servings a day. Currently only 48% of females in Ontario 18+ are doing this. (A Report on Cancer 2020, 2006)
2. If you are not already doing so, add 30 minutes to your daily physical activity. Currently only 46% of females in Ontario 18+ are doing this. (A Report on Cancer 2020, 2006)
3. If you drink alcohol. Decrease or stop alcohol intake. Currently 1 in 4 female high school students drink five or more drinks at one time at least once a month. 1 in 10 do it 2-3 times a month. (Ontario Student Drug and Health Survey, 2007)



Q10

HOW CAN I
ESTABLISH AND
MAINTAIN PERSONAL
HABITS THAT WILL
HELP ME IN THE
FUTURE?



For a start, eat a piece of fruit, and after you eat it, walk around the block.

Tomorrow, add another piece of fruit and one more vegetable to your diet and walk three blocks.

Friday night when you are with your friends, reduce your alcohol. Drink 2 drinks not three. If you don't drink, don't start.

These are just some suggestions on ways that you can easily make changes/adaptations to your lifestyle. Once you have established these healthy habits, keep them up. You're worth it!

Go to the website

www.hookuptobreastcancerprevention.com

for ways that girls have told us actually work for them.



Here are some additional websites to check out:

For general information and research on cancer and breast cancer:

www.cbcbf.org (Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation)

www.cancer.ca (Canadian Cancer Society)

www.ncic.cancer.ca (National Cancer Institute of Canada)

www.rethinkbreastcancer.com (Rethink Breast Cancer)

For specific information on checking your breasts:

<http://rethinkbreastcancer.com/touchlookcheck.html/>

For information on cancer myths:

http://www.cancer.ca/Canada-wide/About%20cancer/Cancer%20myths.aspx?sc_lang=en

For an article on Tobacco Smoke as a Cause of Breast Cancer in Young Women:

http://www.inwat.org/pdf/THE_%20NET_Sept07_Feb08.pdf

For information about BPA or other environmental contaminants go to the

Government of Canada site **<http://www.chemicalsubstanceschimiques.gc.ca/en/index.html>** or the Canadian Cancer Society's webpage **http://www.cancer.ca/ccs/internet/standard/0,3182,3172_367525__langld-en,00.html**.

References: "Drug Use Among Ontario Students" (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2007) "Straight Talk About Marijuana" (Health Canada, 2003)



7 Hawksdale Road, Toronto, Ontario, M3K 1W3

Phone: 416-395-4970 . Fax: 1-866-591-7685

Email: pad@sympatico.ca



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www.hookuptobreastcancerprevention.ca

www.parentactionondrugs.org