



BREAST HEALTH AND YOU

A YOUNG WOMAN'S GUIDE





Founded by three young survivors in 1998, Young Survival Coalition (YSC) is the go-to organization for young women affected by breast cancer and their co-survivors. With local networks across the United States, YSC provides free resources, connections and educational materials to support and empower young women affected by breast cancer and ensure no one faces the disease alone.



BREAST CANCER & YOUNG WOMEN

Many people think only older women get breast cancer. **This is NOT true.**

Young women **can** and **do** get breast cancer.

It is important that you learn the truth about breast cancer and know what to do if something in your breasts does not feel normal. When you know the truth, you can take charge of your breast health.

- 1** Nearly 13,000 cases of breast cancer in women under age 40 are diagnosed each year.
- 2** Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women ages 15 to 39.
- 3** Nearly 80 percent of young women diagnosed with breast cancer find their breast abnormality themselves.
- 4** Young women are often diagnosed with more advanced breast cancer and/or more aggressive subtypes than older women.
- 5** Race, ethnicity, language barriers and cultural beliefs may prevent some young women from understanding their personal risk of breast cancer.
- 6** There are no effective breast cancer screening tools for women younger than 40 years old, so it is crucial that you are your own best health advocate.
- 7** Breast cancer risk increases slightly for approximately 10 years after a first birth. After that, it drops below the risk of women who don't have children.

7 FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT BREAST CANCER

Most lumps are not cancerous, but if you feel one, have a doctor check it out to be sure.

10 COMMON MYTHS ABOUT BREAST CANCER

There are many myths about breast cancer. The following statements are NOT true:

- 1** Breast cancer can be prevented.
- 2** Only women with a family history of breast cancer develop the disease.
- 3** A woman's family history of breast cancer on her father's side does not affect her risk.
- 4** If a woman is at high risk for breast cancer, there is little she can do.
- 5** Mammograms cause breast cancer.
- 6** Wearing an underwire bra or sleeping in a bra increases a woman's risk of getting breast cancer.
- 7** All breast lumps are cancer.
- 8** Breast cancer always comes in the form of a lump.
- 9** Women with small breasts have less chance of getting breast cancer.
- 10** Women with large or lumpy breasts have a higher risk of developing breast cancer.

ALL OF THESE STATEMENTS ARE FALSE.

GUARD YOUR GOOD HEALTH

Breast cancer cannot be prevented, but there are ways you can achieve an overall healthy lifestyle in mind, body and spirit and decrease your risk.



- Eat balanced meals with many fruits and vegetables.
 - Drink plenty of water.
 - Get regular exercise.*
 - Support bone health through physical activity* and appropriate intake of vitamin D and calcium.
 - Limit your alcohol use to no more than one glass a day.
 - Get enough rest.
 - Reduce stress.
 - Pray, meditate or just find private time for yourself.
 - Make time for enjoyable and fun activities.
 - Do not smoke.
- *Check with your doctor before starting any physical activities.



HEALTH & WELLNESS TIPS:

- Consult your doctor or use an online body mass index (BMI) calculator to determine the weight range that is healthiest for you.
- Keep an eye on your diet and intake of key nutrients by using a tool like [choosemyplate.gov](https://www.choosemyplate.gov).
- Check your local community or recreation center for free or low-cost fitness, dance or yoga classes.

BREAST CANCER RISK FACTORS

Risk factors include anything that increases your chance of developing breast cancer. There are some risk factors you can control and others you cannot.

Risk factors you CANNOT control

- The fact that you are a woman
- Getting older
- Family history of breast cancer
- Having breast cancer in the past
- Chest exposure to radiation when you were a child or teenager
- First menstrual period earlier than age 12

Risk factors that you CAN control

- Maintain a healthy weight
- Limit alcohol use
- Exercise regularly
- Have your first child before age 30, if possible
- Breastfeed, if possible

For more information about breast cancer risk factors, visit [cancer.org/cancer/breastcancer/detailedguide/breast-cancer-risk-factors](https://www.cancer.org/cancer/breastcancer/detailedguide/breast-cancer-risk-factors).



SIGNS & SYMPTOMS OF BREAST CANCER

- A lump or unusual thickening in the breast or underarm area
- A change in color or rash on the skin of the breast
- Unusual nipple discharge
- Swelling of all or part of the breast
- A change in size or shape of the breast
- Itchy, sore or scaling of the nipple
- Dimpling on breast skin or nipple turning inward
- Breast or nipple pain that does not go away

If you experience any of the above symptoms, consult your physician. If your concern is not taken seriously, you may have to insist on discussing whether further testing is appropriate. Ultrasound, mammography, MRI and/or biopsy can be used to investigate something suspicious.

Note: If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, normal changes to the breast and nipple may be more dramatic. But if you see something that concerns you, ask your doctor. Young women can be diagnosed with breast cancer while pregnant or nursing.

KNOW YOUR BREASTS

It is important that you are familiar with your breasts and aware of the signs and symptoms of breast cancer. This way, you can tell your doctor right away if you notice any changes in your breasts.

TAKE STEPS TODAY!
Have discussions with your family members to find out if there is a history of breast cancer.

KNOW YOUR FAMILY HISTORY

Most women with breast cancer do NOT have a family history of the disease. However, it is important to know your family history because it is possible for breast cancer to be passed down through your family line. This is called hereditary breast cancer, and the chance of inheriting a breast cancer-related gene mutation is the same (50%) from both your mother and father's side of the family.

Today, doctors know that many breast cancer-related genes, including BRCA1 or BRCA2, are linked to hereditary breast cancer. Mutations (alterations/changes) in these genes increase a woman's risk of developing breast cancer.

A family history of cancer (relatives on either side of your family diagnosed with cancer) may lead your doctor to suggest genetic testing to determine your risk for breast cancer.

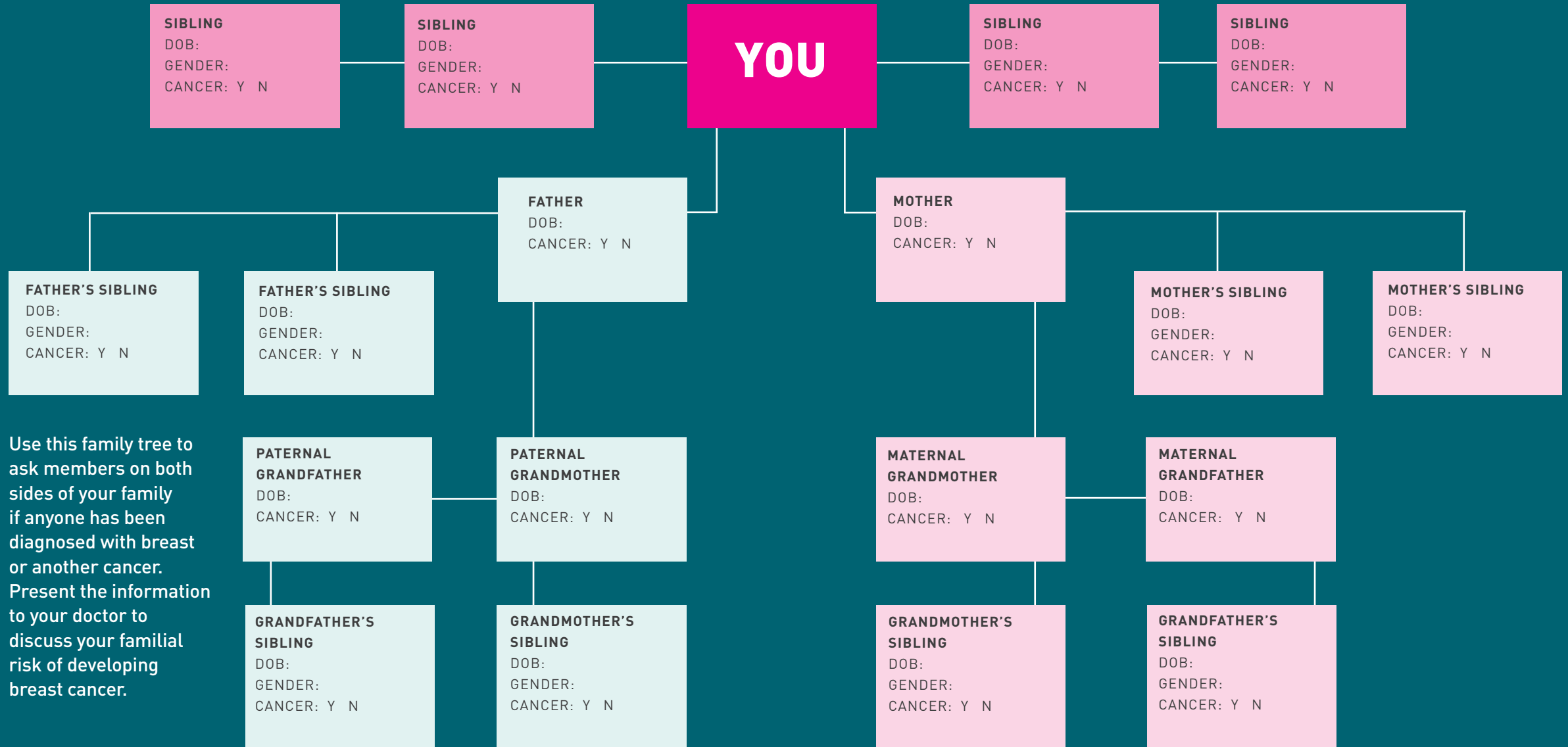
If you don't understand information about your family medical history and/or genetic testing, ask questions until you do. With the right information, you and your doctor can create a breast cancer surveillance plan that is best for you.

For more information about familial or hereditary breast cancer, visit youngsurvival.org or check out the CDC's KNOWBRCA tool cdc.gov/cancer/breast/young_women/knowbrca.htm.



USE THE "FAMILY TREE" on pages 8 and 9 to help identify those in your family diagnosed with breast or other cancers.

YOUR FAMILY TREE



Use this family tree to ask members on both sides of your family if anyone has been diagnosed with breast or another cancer. Present the information to your doctor to discuss your familial risk of developing breast cancer.



WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I FIND SOMETHING SUSPICIOUS?



First, see your primary care doctor or OB/GYN if you find something unusual. Though there are currently no effective screening tools for young women, there are diagnostic tools available if there is something suspicious. Ask your doctor about the following. And remember, if you still have concerns, get a second opinion.

- **A CLINICAL BREAST EXAM (CBE).** This is when a doctor or appropriate medical professional checks your breasts for unusual changes by looking at and feeling your breasts and underarms. A young woman should be receiving CBEs as part of her regular gynecological care.
- **A MAMMOGRAM (OR MAMMOGRAPHY).** This is an x-ray of the breasts, which is used to find breast cancer – most often in women over 45. Mammograms are not as good at finding cancers in young and/or dense breasts.
- **AN ULTRASOUND.** This is a scan of the breast that uses sound waves to produce images of the insides of the breasts.
- **AN MRI (MAGNETIC RESONANCE IMAGING).** This is a scan of the breasts that uses magnets and radio waves to produce images of the inside of the body.

Ask at what age you should begin getting mammograms or other tests to look for breast cancer. If you have a family history of breast cancer, you and your doctor may decide to begin regular mammograms, ultrasounds or MRIs before you turn 40 years old.

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR

YOU are the most important part of your healthcare team. You should feel comfortable asking questions and asking for more information, if you do not understand something.

When talking to your doctor, be sure to discuss your personal risks for breast cancer and any other issues that concern you.

- **DO NOT WAIT.** See your doctor and inform him or her if you feel any changes in your breasts.
- **DO NOT FEEL EMBARRASSED OR ASHAMED.** If you do not feel comfortable talking to your healthcare provider, consider finding a new one or bringing a supportive friend.
- **DO NOT LET SOMEONE TELL YOU THAT “YOU ARE TOO YOUNG FOR BREAST CANCER.”** If necessary, get a second opinion from another doctor.
- **KEEP YOUR APPOINTMENTS.** If your healthcare provider thinks you need to have follow-up tests (such as a mammogram, MRI or ultrasound), write down the scheduled date, time, address and phone number. It can be helpful to have a family member or friend go with you for support.

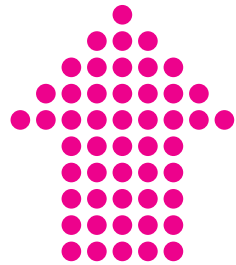
If you do not have a doctor or health insurance, check with your local social services agency or the Department of Health and Human Services to find out what options are available.



- As a patient, you have the right to be treated with respect. If you do not feel that you have been treated well, ask to speak to a manager, social worker or patient navigator and consider seeing a new doctor.
- If there is an issue with understanding the language at your doctor's office, in some cases you can request that someone who speaks your native language be provided to help you.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS





IF YOU KNOW A YOUNG WOMAN WITH BREAST CANCER

Be supportive. For any woman, hearing the words “you have breast cancer” is scary. If you know a young woman with breast cancer, remind her that she is not alone. There are thousands of young women who have survived breast cancer or are currently being treated for the disease. There is hope.

7 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HELP

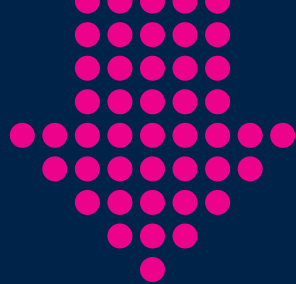
- **LEARN MORE.** youngsurvival.org is full of information that is easy to understand. There are materials you can read, print and order – all for free.
- **STAY IN TOUCH.** Even when you don’t know what to say, keep in touch. Send a card, drop an email or send a text. Just saying, “I am sorry you have to go through this, but I am thinking of you” can brighten her day. Continue to reach out even after treatment is over and she begins a “new normal,” which is sometimes scarier than going through treatment.
- **KEEP PEOPLE UPDATED.** Keeping family and friends informed can be overwhelming, so offer to take on that role. MyLifeLine has a free service for cancer patients, where you can easily post updates and loved ones can leave notes of support.
- **OFFER TO RUN AN ERRAND.** Do the grocery shopping, pick up a prescription, drop the kids off at school, cook a meal or do household chores - anything that can make her life easier.
- **OFFER TO GO TO APPOINTMENTS.** You can provide comfort, listen and take notes or record the visit for her to refer to later. Help her ask questions if she doesn’t understand the information.
- **FIND A PATIENT NAVIGATOR.** Suggest she speak to a patient navigator or social worker who may be able to assist with finding financial support resources, including free or low-cost healthcare.
- **FIND RESOURCES.** Offer to find support services in your area. You can order her a free Newly Diagnosed Navigator and help her connect with other young survivors through YSC SurvivorLink or local YSC F2F networking groups. Visit youngsurvival.org or call 877.972.1011 to speak with someone who can help you.

While there is a lot of information about breast cancer on the Internet, it is not all factual. Here are a few reliable resources:

YOUNG SURVIVAL COALITION
youngsurvival.org
877.972.1011

National Cancer Institute’s booklet:
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BREAST CANCER
cancer.gov
800.422.6237

SUSAN G. KOMEN’S “FACTS FOR LIFE” SERIES
includes *When You Discover a Lump*, *Genetics & Breast Cancer*, and *Young Women & Breast Cancer*
komen.org
877.395.6636



Please contact
YSC for a full list of
programs, local groups
and resources:

youngsurvival.org

info@youngsurvival.org

877.972.1011

DISCLAIMER

YSC has provided this resource for educational, informational and community purposes only as a resource to young women and the people whose lives are affected by breast cancer. For specific answers to questions or concerns, you should consult your doctor, as treatment for each patient varies with individual circumstances. The content is not intended in any way to be a substitute for professional counseling or medical advice. You should not rely upon information found in this publication without seeking the advice of a qualified healthcare provider. YSC does not endorse, recommend or make any warranties or representations regarding any of the materials, products or information provided by organizations referred to in this resource. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health service provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition or treatment. Never disregard medical advice or delay in seeking it based on information you have read in this resource.

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YSC IS HERE TO HELP

YSC has many free resources, support programs and networking opportunities to help you learn more about young women and breast cancer. We work to spread factual information about how breast cancer impacts the physical, emotional and mental health of young women.

GET INVOLVED

Interested in volunteering with YSC? Learn about participating in awareness and outreach, supporting survivors and fundraising efforts by becoming a YSC volunteer! Visit youngsurvival.org/ignite to make an impact.



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