

Lifestyle factors could put college-age women at higher risk of breast cancer

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Breast cancer prevention needs to become a shared conversation among women of all ages as it can strike at any age, and is generally more aggressive when diagnosed in women under the age of 50. With hopes to spark that discussion, Isabelle Mercier, PhD, a research assistant professor at University of the Sciences, compiled some key prevention awareness tips for young women.

"Unfortunately, college-age women generally do not consider themselves at risk for breast cancer," said Dr. Mercier. "However, there are several [risk factors](#) that contribute to the development of breast cancer that need to be understood early in life to prevent the development of breast cancer down the road."

By the end of 2013, more than 230,000 new cases of [invasive breast cancer](#) are expected to be diagnosed in the U.S. Of those cases, approximately 40,000 individuals will not survive, said Dr. Mercier. Women in their early 20s need to become aware of some key risk factors associated with breast cancer:

- Check your family tree. A family history of breast cancer, particularly in a mother or sister, can increase the chance for developing breast cancer. Genetic testing is recommended for young women with prevalence of breast cancer in their families.
- Watch your weight. Obesity is responsible for up to 20 percent of cancer-associated deaths in women. Being overweight or obese increases the risk of breast cancer by creating a cancer-friendly environment through fat cells.
- Exercise regularly. Women who strive for at least 2.5 hours per week of moderate-intensity activity – like brisk walking – reduce their risk of breast cancer by 18 percent.

- Limit alcohol consumption. According to new research from Washington University School of Medicine, if a female averages a drink per day, her risk of breast cancer increases by 11 percent. Studies show that alcohol possesses estrogenic activity, thus promoting the growth of [breast tumor](#) cells.
- Annual doc visits. Although mammograms are not recommended for women under the age of 40, [young women](#) should still see their primary care doctors each year for clinical breast exams. They are also encouraged to conduct self-examinations throughout the year.
- Limit tobacco use. Women who smoke have an increased risk of developing breast cancer, especially if they become smokers early in life. Smokers have increased levels of both estrogen and testosterone that might disrupt the endocrine signaling in [women](#) and contribute to the development of these tumors.

An important part of Dr. Mercier's research focuses on cancer prevention. The role of vitamin C intake on breast cancer development, progression, recurrence and response to anti-cancer therapy remains unclear. That's why Dr. Mercier and her research team are currently studying the role of dietary supplements on cancer risk, as well as evaluating new biomarkers for early detection of [breast cancer](#). She received her PhD in physiology and BS in biochemistry from University of Montreal.

Provided by University of the Sciences

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