

Reducing Your Risk of Breast Cancer



Understanding Your Risk:

Breast cancer is a complex disease with various risk factors, including family history, genetics, lifestyle, and environmental factors. If you are at increased risk of breast cancer, it's essential to understand what factors contribute to your risk and what steps you can take to reduce it.

Prior to your screening mammogram you answered breast health risk questions called the Tyrer-Cuzick or TC Score assessment. A TC Score indicates your lifetime risk for breast cancer. Based on your responses you may see information in your Epic MyChart or receive a letter informing you that your risk of developing breast cancer is higher as compared to other women your age. It is recommended that you consider an appointment with a Nurse Practitioner at our specialty breast health clinic to understand your personal risk and strategies to reduce this risk. This information will also be shared with your primary care provider so you can discuss next steps as far as ordering additional testing such as a Breast MRI.

Referral to the McLeod High Risk Breast Clinic can be made by your healthcare provider or by calling 843-777-4444.

Risk Factors for Breast Cancer:

- **Family History:** Most women who are diagnosed with breast cancer do not have a family history of the disease. However, family history should still be considered when evaluating your individual risk. A family history of breast cancer in a first-degree relative (mother, sister, daughter), nearly doubles a woman's risk. Having two first-degree relatives nearly triples the risk of developing breast cancer. Women with a father or brother that have had breast cancer may also be of higher risk.
- **Genetics:** Five to ten percent of breast cancer is thought to be passed on from a parent through gene changes. Most commonly, a change in the BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene contributes to hereditary breast cancer, however other gene mutations may also slightly increase the risk of breast cancer. To best understand your individual risk, your healthcare team may recommend further genetic counseling and testing.
- **Personal History:** If you've had breast cancer in one breast, you have an increased risk of developing cancer in either breast. You also may have an increased risk of breast cancer if a previous breast biopsy was done revealing certain high-risk lesions on the breast such as atypical ductal hyperplasia (ADH), atypical lobular hyperplasia (ALH), or lobular carcinoma in situ (LCIS).
- **Dense Breast Tissue:** Breast density of category C or D on your mammogram report indicates you may have dense breasts and have a slightly higher risk of breast cancer.
- **Lifestyle Factors:** Factors such as smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, lack of physical activity, and obesity can also contribute to an increased risk.

Reducing Your Risk:

While some risk factors for breast cancer, such as family history and genetics, cannot be changed, there are steps you can take to reduce your overall risk:

- **Regular Screening:** Follow your healthcare provider's recommendations for breast cancer screening, including mammograms and other imaging tests such as Digital Breast Tomosynthesis, Breast Ultrasound, and/or Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), for patients with increased density. Early detection can significantly improve treatment outcomes.
- **Know Your Breasts:** Become familiar with how your breasts look and feel. Report any changes or abnormalities to your healthcare provider promptly.
- **Maintain a Healthy Weight:** Aim for a healthy weight through a balanced diet and regular exercise totaling 150 minutes of moderate or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity physical activity. Obesity is associated with an increased risk of breast cancer, particularly after menopause.
- **Limit Alcohol Intake:** Avoid alcohol. If you drink alcohol, limit consumption to no more than one drink per day for women, as excessive alcohol intake is linked to an increased risk of breast cancer.
- **Quit Smoking:** If you smoke, quit smoking. Smoking increases your risk of lung and breast cancer. For questions about smoking cessation, call the McLeod Smoking Cessation Clinic at (843) 777-7863.
- **Breastfeed, If Possible:** Breastfeeding may reduce the risk of breast cancer, especially if done for six months or more after giving birth.
- **Hormone Therapy:** Try to manage menopausal symptoms with non-hormonal methods before using hormone replacement therapy. Discuss the potential risks and benefits with your healthcare provider.
- **Genetic Counseling and Testing:** If you have a family history of breast cancer or other risk factors, consider genetic counseling and testing to assess your risk. Ask your healthcare provider for a referral to McLeod Oncology and Hematology Associates.
- **Consider Preventative Measures:** Based upon your personal comprehensive risk assessment, some patients may benefit from surgical or medical intervention such as prophylactic mastectomy, salpingo-oophorectomy, or hormone blocking medications to reduce their risk of breast and ovarian cancers. Discuss the potential risks and benefits with your healthcare team.

For more information, contact the facility closest to you:

McLeod Regional Medical Center (843) 777-5276

McLeod Health Seacoast (843) 366-2700

McLeod Health Loris (843) 716-7583

McLeod Health Carolina Forest (843) 646-8045

McLeod Health Clarendon (803) 435-5224

McLeod Health Cheraw (843) 320-5838

McLeod Health Dillon (843) 487-1280

McLeod High-Risk Breast Clinic (843) 777-4444