

# Young Women and Breast Cancer



Young women CAN and DO get breast cancer. It is estimated that more than 250,000 women diagnosed with breast cancer at age 40 or younger are living in the U.S. today.

More than 13,000 young women will be diagnosed this year. While

breast cancer in young women accounts for a small percentage of all breast cancer cases, the impact of the disease is significant.

Some studies have suggested that recent use (during the past 10 years) of oral contraceptives (birth control pills) results in a very slight increased risk for developing breast cancer over those who have never taken them. Other studies, however, show no such effect. Researchers continue to study the conflicting results in these trials to determine if birth control pills, synthetic hormones (estrogen and progesterone/progestin), play a role in breast cancer.

However, hormone replacement therapy with estrogens and progestins has been linked to a higher risk of breast cancer development.

## What Is Different About Breast Cancer in Younger Women?

Diagnosing breast cancer in younger women (under 40 years old) is more difficult, because their breast tissue is generally denser than the breast tissue in older women. By the time a lump in a younger woman's breast can be felt, the cancer often is advanced.

In addition, breast cancer in younger women may be aggressive and less likely to respond to [treatment](#). Women who are diagnosed with breast cancer at a younger age are more likely to have a mutated (altered) BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene.

Delays in diagnosing breast cancer also are a problem. Many younger women who have breast cancer ignore the warning signs -- such as a [breast](#)

[lump](#) or unusual nipple discharge -- because they believe they are too young to get breast cancer.

Many women assume they are too young to get breast cancer and tend to assume a lump is a harmless cyst or other growth. Some health care providers also dismiss breast lumps in young women as cysts and adopt a "wait and see" approach.

In general, regular [mammograms](#) are not recommended for women under 40 years old, in part because breast tissue tends to be denser in young women, making mammograms less effective as a screening tool. In addition, most experts believe the low risk of developing breast cancer at a young age does not justify the radiation exposure or the cost of mammography. However, screening mammograms may be recommended for younger women with a family history of breast cancer and other risk factors.

Digital mammography may be a useful alternate to a standard mammogram, as digital mammography is more sensitive in detecting abnormalities in the presence of dense breast tissue.

Check your breasts monthly with a **Breast Self Exam**, a week after your menstrual cycle, see: <http://www.nationalbreastcancer.org/breast-self-exam>

**Ladies, if you have found any sign or symptom of breast cancer, please seek medical attention immediately. Do not wait or be told, "You are too young to worry about breast cancer". Breast cancer can occur in women as young as 15 years old.**

Take time to take care of your breasts, your health, your life!

**Sources:**

<http://www.youngsurvival.org/breast-cancer-in-young-women>

<http://www.cancer.org/cancer/news/study-more-young-women-being-diagnosed-with-advanced-breast-cancer>

<http://www.webmd.com/breast-cancer/guide/breast-cancer-young-women>

<http://www.nationalbreastcancer.org/breast-self-exam>