

Defeating Breast Cancer

What Can We Do To Defeat Breast Cancer?

Early Detection

One of the keys to successfully defeating breast cancer is catching it early. It has been estimated that finding breast cancer early can mean a survival rate of 97%. One part of catching breast cancer early in black women is to develop a breast cancer screening programme for black women that start earlier. Currently breast cancer screening in the UK starts at 50 years old and as we now know that a significant number of black women develop breast cancer on average in their mid forties it would thus be more effective to begin screening black women at an earlier age. The second part of catching breast cancer early is to create a greater awareness amongst black women about the signs and symptoms of breast cancer. Armed with this information black women must endeavour to carry out a regular breast self examinations looking out for changes in their breasts that are not associated with menstruation. The signs and symptoms to look out for include:

- Changes in the size and shape of breasts
- Changes in the skin texture - puckering, dimpling
- An inverted/retracted nipple
- A bloodstained discharge from one or both nipples
- A lump in the breast or armpit
- Pain in the breast that doesn't go away with your period

Breast Cancer Risk Factors

As well as being aware of the signs and symptoms of breast cancer it is also important to be aware of the risk factors so that women get an understanding of if they are at a high risk but also so changes can be made reduce their risk of developing breast cancer. The following are the main risk factors for all breast cancers in general:



- The age at which you started your period. Women who started their period young (before 12) are at a slightly higher risk of developing breast cancer
- The age at which you go through menopause. Women who go through menopause at a late age (after 55) are at a slightly higher risk of developing breast cancer
- Our Reproductive Habits
 - Women who delay child bearing (after 30) or have no children are at a higher risk
 - The more children a woman has the lower her risk
 - Women who breast feed are at a significantly lower risk of developing breast cancer
- The Contraceptive Pill. Women who currently or recently use(d) the pill are at a slightly higher risk
- Hormone Replacement Therapy. This increases your risk of developing breast cancer
- A high body mass index increases your risk of developing breast cancer
- Physical activity reduces your risk of developing breast cancer
- Alcohol intake increases your risk of developing breast cancer
- A diet high in saturated fat could increase your risk of developing breast cancer
- A family history of breast cancer increases your risk of developing breast cancer

For triple negative breast cancer studies so far have indicated the follow risk factors are key:

- The age at which a woman started her period started. A strong link was found between black women who started their period at a young and triple negative breast cancer
- Black women who were young (early twenties) when they had their first child were found to be at a higher risk of developing triple negative breast cancer
- Black women with more than 4 children had a higher risk of developing triple negative breast cancer
- Black women who breast feed are at a significantly lower risk of developing triple negative breast cancer
- Being over weight was associated with an increased risk of developing triple negative breast cancer.



One study estimated that breastfeeding and maintaining a good body weight could prevent close to two-thirds of triple negative breast cancers.

Prevention

A healthy lifestyle can make a significant contribution to breast cancer prevention. We can make changes such as:

- **Trying not to delay starting a family (beyond 35) and trying not to start a family too early (teens or early twenties).**
- **Breastfeeding**
- **Engaging in regular exercise**
- **Maintaining a good weight**
- **Avoiding taking the pill**
- **Avoiding taking hormone replacement therapy**
- **Making sure you have a healthy diet (low in fat, low in red meat, high in fibre, fruits and vegetables)**
- **Limiting your alcohol intake**