

# Ask the Doctor

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## **Clinical pharmacist Dr. Diana Rangaves answers your questions about preventing cancer.**

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Q: What kind of preventative measures can I take to monitor my risks for predominantly female cancers?

Cancer is the second leading cause of death per year in the U.S., just behind heart disease. According to the American Cancer Society, cancer results in the death of about 600,000 people yearly. Based on their 2019 projection, there will be 1.76 million new cancer cases diagnosed with 606,880 of these resulting in death. However, the rate of new cases diagnosed in both males and females has been on a decline for the past 25 years.

The most common cancers affecting women are breast, cervical, ovarian, endometrial, and lung cancer. Breast cancer alone accounts for 30 percent of cancer cases in women. Many risk factors are beyond our control. These include age, family medical history, genetic heritage, and environmental issues. Ongoing research continues to identify habits and

behaviors that may lower risks.

## **Proactive preventative measures:**

### **1. Be active and maintain a healthy weight**

Obesity can increase your risk of developing breast cancer, especially after menopause. However, research demonstrates that engaging in regular aerobic exercise can lower your risk of developing breast cancer. Your physical activities do not need to be excessive. Walking is a great way to increase blood circulation, burn calories, and keep a balanced body weight.

### **2. Avoid smoking**

According to [breastcancer.org](http://breastcancer.org), the risk of breast cancer is higher in young, premenopausal women that smoke. In postmenopausal women, research shows a correlation between heavy second-hand smoke contact and breast cancer risk. The Food and Drug Administration also reports 80 percent of deaths from lung cancer are due to smoking.

### **3. Oral contraceptives**

According to the American Cancer Society and researchers, there is an established, significant link of a lower risk for developing ovarian cancer with the use of the birth control pill, even among women who carry the BRCA-1 and BRCA-2 gene mutation. However, oral contraceptive may also slightly increase the risk of developing breast cancer. It is advisable that any woman considering her options consults with her health care provider.

### **4. Lifestyle choices**

Adopting healthy lifestyle choices can make a huge difference in minimizing your risk of developing cancers. Some of these include breastfeeding for more than one year, limiting your intake of processed meat, reducing alcohol intake, and eating quality fruits and vegetables.

### **5. Practice safe sex**

Practicing safe sex—including the use of condoms and limiting sexual partners—can lower your risk for cancer. People with sexually transmitted infections, such as HPV or HIV, are at higher risk of developing cancers of the lung, anus, and liver.

### **6. Sun protection**

Exposing your skin constantly to the sun increases your risk. If you cannot stay out of the sun, health tips are to use a suitable UVA and UVB sunblock, limit your time outside, and wear a wide-brimmed hat. Contact your medical professional at the first sign of skin discoloration or areas that do not heal

discoloration of areas that do not heal.

## 7. Early screenings and vaccination

Keep your annual doctor appointments. Self-examination and medical checks can help you detect early signs and symptoms of cancer. Complete your monthly breast checks regularly. This is especially important for women over 40 years old or if you have a family history of breast cancer. Vaccinations against infections such as HPV and hepatitis B can lower your risk of developing cervical cancer.



**Dr. Diana Rangaves** is a doctor of pharmacy. She graduated from the University of California, San Francisco, and specializes in pharmacotherapy management. Rangaves was an academic college professor teaching critical thinking, ethics, pharmacology, addiction, behavior patterns, pharmacy, and nursing. As a clinical pharmacist, she is focused on chronic or disease-state management.

She currently serves as clinical director for ARISE Africa Foundation, which specializes in adult education and the reduction of STD/HIV in Nigeria. She has published several books and writes for

numerous outlets, in print and online.

