

Managing Risk for Breast Cancer: “The Gail Model”

Breast cancer is the second leading cause of death for women in the United States. The *State of Health Care Quality* report notes that in the United States women have a 1 in 7 chance of getting breast cancer in their life. When caught early, breast cancer is treatable. The Gail Model is a common tool to assess if you are at high risk for breast cancer.

What is the Gail Model?

The Gail Model is a tool used to assess your risk for breast cancer. We use a computer-based program that looks at your personal and family history to estimate your chance of developing breast cancer.

The Gail Model has been shown to accurately find your risk of getting an invasive breast cancer during the next 5 years and up to age 90 (lifetime risk).

We assess your risk based on a score that we obtain from your answers to questions we ask. A score of more than 1.7% for a 5-year risk or a lifetime score of more than 2 times the normal score for your age may be a sign that you are at high risk.

What increases my chance of breast cancer?

One or a number of the below factors may increase your chances of developing breast cancer.

- Age
- When you had your first period and/or your first living child
- Number of relatives with breast cancer
- How many biopsies you have had
- History of abnormal cells on a biopsy
- Thick or dense breasts
- Use of oral birth control
- Race/ethnicity
- Diet, weight and activity
- Medications you are taking
- Alcohol intake

What can I do if I am at high risk for breast cancer?

- Have a breast exam every 6 months
- Mammogram every 1 year
- Medication/chemoprevention for 5 years
- Surgery to remove your breasts
- Breast MRI for lifetime risk $\geq 20\%$

What is chemoprevention for high-risk patients?

- Chemoprevention is medications or drugs taken to decrease the chance of you getting breast cancer.
- There are two proven drugs that we use to prevent breast cancer: Tamoxifen and Raloxifene. These drugs may stop breast cancers from forming.

What is the risk of taking a drug to reduce my risk?

As with any drug, there can be some side effects such as:

- Hot flashes
- Blood clots (you are at high risk for this if you smoke)
- Endometrial thickening in post-menopausal women. Drugs can be stopped if this occurs. There is a small risk of endometrial thickening turning into cancer.

What can I do to help prevent breast cancer whether I am high risk or not?

- Perform a monthly self breast exam
- If you are a woman age 40 or older, get a mammogram every 1-2 years; your doctor may suggest mammograms at an earlier age
- Yearly clinical breast exam by your provider
- Maintain an ideal body weight
- Exercise 3-5 times a week for 20-50 minutes
- Drink no more than two alcoholic drinks a day

What if I have a strong family history of breast cancer or ovarian cancer?

Some family histories may point to genetic concerns and your doctor may recommend you see a genetic counselor for testing for the cancer genes.

The information presented is intended for general information and educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care provider. Contact your health care provider if you believe you have a health problem.