

WELLBEING

# Breast Laid Plans

*October is Breast Cancer Awareness month, so now is the perfect time to ensure you're doing everything you can to minimise your risk of developing the disease*

**The facts around** breast cancer can make for startling reading. It's the most common form of cancer in the UK and one in eight women will develop it, while many more will be affected by it. Whether it is you, a friend, colleague or family member, most of us know someone who has been diagnosed with the disease.

Unfortunately, while survival rates continue to rise thanks to advances in early detection and treatment, there is no surefire way to prevent breast cancer. However, there are ways to reduce your risk of getting it – along with boosting your chances of beating the disease if you do. And best of all, many of them are surprisingly simple.

#### STROLL ON

Regular exercise is recommended for anyone who wants to stay healthy, but recent research by Macmillan Cancer Relief found that breast

cancer sufferers who walked a mile a day reduced their risk of dying from the disease by 40 per cent. According to the study, following the same regime of moderate-intensity exercise also helped prevent their cancer from reoccurring.

#### BREASTFEED YOUR BABY

Not only better for babies, breastfeeding is good news for their mothers, too. Studies have shown that women who breastfeed are less likely to develop breast cancer. While the exact reason for this is not fully understood, it is thought to be linked to the effect breastfeeding has on oestrogen levels.

#### MAINTAIN A HEALTHY WEIGHT

In addition to its well-documented links to heart disease, obesity appears to increase the risk of breast cancer. Researchers found that women who gained 44-55lb after the age of 18 had a

40 per cent greater risk of getting breast cancer than women who fluctuated by only 4-5lb throughout their adult life. Meanwhile, studies on animals have shown that reducing calorie intake by 30 per cent can lead to an 80 per cent reduction in the risk of breast tumours.

#### DON'T DRINK

At least, not to excess. Consumption of alcohol has been found to increase levels of oestrogen, although how much alcohol is too much remains subject to debate. Some researchers argue that even moderate amounts are unsafe; others that drinking up to 14 units a week is fine. It is a good idea to stick within the current guidelines, which recommend that women have no more than 14 units of alcohol a week. Doing so could not only help to prevent breast cancer but is also beneficial to your general health and wellbeing.

## BE BREAST AWARE

At present, in the UK mammogram screening is offered to women between the ages of 50 and 70 once every three years. But if you're not eligible, don't worry; studies show that simply being breast aware makes women more likely to see their GP as soon as they discover any changes to their breast tissue. This in turn leads to earlier diagnosis and better survival rates. In fact, more than 90 per cent of breast tumours are detected by women themselves, so monitoring the look and feel of your breasts should be an important part of your healthcare routine. Advice on when and how to examine your breasts has changed in recent years. It is now recommended that you get to know what they look like in front of a mirror, as well as how they feel – you can do this either in the shower or lying down – at different times of the month. That way, you will ensure that any changes are picked up as quickly as

possible. If you find a lump or abnormality visit your GP immediately – most lumps are non-cancerous, but it is always better to get them checked out.

## TAKE ASPIRIN

The Irish Cancer Society is planning a national clinical study to determine exactly how a daily dose of aspirin can help prevent the spread of breast cancer. This follows a previous Irish study, which found that in women with stage I-III breast cancer the disease was less likely to spread to their lymph nodes and they were more likely to survive if they had been prescribed aspirin in the years before diagnosis. Researchers are also hoping to determine the optimum dose of aspirin needed. **■**

• *If you're concerned about the possibility of carrying the BRAC genetic mutation that increases the chance of developing breast cancer, visit [macmillan.org.uk/opera](http://macmillan.org.uk/opera).*

FAME AND FORTUNE ARE NO PROTECTION AGAINST BREAST CANCER. THESE STARS HAVE BATTLED THE DISEASE THAT STRIKES ONE IN EIGHT WOMEN



Kylie Minogue



Christina Applegate



Cynthia Nixon



Sheryl Crow



