

# Living Well with AIMGA

## VOL. 10 - BREAST HEALTH



### OVERVIEW

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among Canadian women, with an estimated 1 in 8 developing it during their lifetime. Breast cancer also can develop in men, not just women. Thus, breast health is a very important topic to touch on, especially in the month of October, which is marked as Breast Cancer Awareness Month. This volume of the Living Well with AIMGA Newsletter will focus on everything from prevention to treatment to recovery.

**Sources:** [Canadian Cancer Society, 2023](#)



### HEALTH REMINDERS!

- Certain [risk factors](#) such as family history, race, ethnicity, sex, and age are unmodifiable but important to be aware of when it comes to prevention and early detection. Know your family history. A woman's risk for breast cancer is higher if she has a mother, sister, daughter, or multiple family members on either her mother's or father's side of the family who have had breast or ovarian cancer.
- There are also modifiable risk factors that can assist with [prevention](#), including being physically active, avoiding alcohol, and having a healthy diet. You can focus on these key areas to stay healthy and reduce your cancer risk.
- Booking regular [mammograms](#) every 2 years is critical for women aged 45-74. Ask your doctor about this or contact a breast cancer screening program in your province / territory. If you are at high risk, your doctor will likely recommend that you get regular mammograms after the age of 30.
- Complete regular self-breast exams to look for unusual signs and symptoms. A breast self-exam takes only a few minutes and can easily be built into your daily routine. You can do a breast exam when you're getting dressed for the day, lying in bed at night, or when taking a shower. The [best time](#) to examine your breasts is usually 1 week after your menstrual period starts, when your breasts are least likely to be swollen or tender.
- It is important to be familiar with your breasts and "[know your normal](#)". This will help you notice any changes.
  - 1) Examine Your Breasts in a Mirror With Hands on Hips;
  - 2) Raise Arms and Examine Your Breasts;
  - 3) Look for Signs of Breast Fluid;
  - 4) Feel for Breast Lumps While Lying Down;
  - 5) Feel Your Breasts for Lumps While Standing or Sitting.
 If you are experiencing any abnormalities that don't feel right to you, contact a health care professional. For more information on how to do your own self-exam, read more [here](#).
- If you're not sure if a [medication](#) is safe while breastfeeding, pump, label and store expressed breast milk until you check with your health care provider.



## RED FLAGS

- 1 Some breast cancers (5%–10%) are caused by an inherited [gene mutation](#) in BRCA1 AND BRCA 2 genes. If you have a family history of breast cancer, talk to your doctor about hereditary breast cancer and next steps such as genetic testing.
- 2 When doing a self-breast exam, if you come across a new breast mass, lump, or other change, consult your family doctor immediately. The most common [warning signs](#) and indicators of breast cancer include: a lump in the breast or armpit, breast thickening or swelling, pain, rash, irritation, or skin dimpling, nipple retraction or discharge, or scaling, peeling or flaking skin on the breast.
- 3 Having dense breasts can decrease the effectiveness of mammography and increase your risk for breast cancer. Dense breasts are common and normal, with about 43% of women ages 40+ having dense breasts. Learn more, including [five reasons](#) why your breast density matters and find out your own [breast density score](#).
- 4 Breastfeeding can be awkward at first! Try out some of these [techniques](#) to find a comfortable position for you. If your baby is not gaining at least 5 to 7 ounces per week since your milk started coming in, consult your family doctor.
- 5 When you drink alcohol, a small amount gets into your breast milk. The amount of alcohol in breast milk depends on the amount of alcohol in the blood. It takes about [2 hours](#) after having one drink for the alcohol to no longer be a concern for your baby. Thus, do not give your baby fresh breast milk for at least 2 hours if you've had one drink, 4 hours if you've had two drinks, etc. If you plan to drink more than a few, do so after breastfeeding's been established for about a month and then "[pump and dump](#)". This is when you pump your milk and throw it away.
- 6 If you have severe nipple pain or significant cracking of the nipples that makes it too painful to nurse, your baby is likely not latching on correctly. Try breastfeeding on the less sore side or even use an electric breast pump until your nipples have healed. Consult your doctor for more information.

## DID YOU KNOW?



AIMGA experts are available to speak to your organization on this topic.

Book your presentation today by emailing [drew@aimga.ca](mailto:drew@aimga.ca)

For more information, [check out the full version](#) of the "Living Well With AIMGA" Newsletter by scanning the QR code below with your phone!



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