Question: What are the risk factors for breast cancer?
Of the factors we can influence, lifestyle plays an increasingly important role in the risk of breast cancer. In one study, women with higher body mass indexes had a 27 percent increase in their risk of developing breast cancer. Moderate or high alcohol consumption, three or more drinks per day, also increases the risk.

Family history is a very important risk factor for women with a close relative who has been diagnosed with breast cancer or for women with an inherited genetic mutation. Late menopause and young age at first menstrual period add to the risk. Women who don’t have children are at a slightly higher risk compared to those who have children, especially in their early twenties. The younger a woman is at her first full-term pregnancy, the lower her breast cancer risk. Breastfeeding has also been shown to be protective.

Most new diagnoses of breast cancer are in women over age 45. Risk is slightly higher among white women in America, compared to all other ethnic and racial groups.

Question: What are the types and stages of breast cancer?
Physicians use standard abbreviations to group cancers into stages called the TNM staging system. “T” stands for the tumor and “N” stands for lymph nodes. “M” signifies the presence of distant metastatic disease, the most serious form of cancer. Stage ranges from stage I, or early/least advanced stage, to IV, which is most advanced or metastatic.

Question: What are the survival rates?
With newer and better treatments available, the survival rate for breast cancer patients is increasing. Clinical trials over the past two decades demonstrate survival rates of up to 90 percent for treated early stage breast cancer. If a tumor is larger, and especially if lymph nodes are involved, survival can range anywhere from 50 percent to 80 percent at five years, depending on tumor characteristics, size and number of lymph nodes involved.

Lower your risks
Here are some scientifically backed suggestions Dr. Lamia Boric gives to all of her patients to lower their risk of breast cancer:

» Maintain a healthy weight. Obesity in postmenopausal women increases the risk of developing breast cancer and the recurrence of cancer by as much as 30 percent.

» Exercise. Physical activity provides a modest risk reduction; however the extent of benefit from exercise is still being studied.

» Don’t smoke and limit your exposure to second-hand smoke. Staying away from tobacco products has a multitude of other health benefits.

» Have your Vitamin D level checked in late fall or the spring. Studies have shown Vitamin D to be protective in terms of breast cancer risk.

» Eat less than five servings of red meat per week. There is an association between eating more red meat and breast cancer.

» Avoid moderate or heavy drinking (two or more alcoholic beverages per day).

» Breastfeed. Studies show that breastfeeding is protective in terms of breast cancer risk.

» For postmenopausal women, avoid combined hormone therapy, such as estrogen-progestin combinations. This has been recently shown to cause an increased risk of developing invasive breast cancer.

Lamia Boric, M.D., is an oncology and hematology specialist at The Corvallis Clinic. She can be reached at 541-754-1256.
A common theme among the advice from cancer survivors is to arm yourself with information by reading as much as possible. If you or someone you know is battling cancer, check out these books recommended by breast cancer survivor Susan Chung.

**Crazy Sexy Cancer Tips by Kris Carr**

Kris Carr is a powerful and inspirational cancer survivor herself with a bawdy sense of humor that kept it real and funny at the same time. You don’t want to lose your sense of humor—especially if you are likely to be bald soon!

**Broken Open by Elizabeth Lesser**

This book was my bible regarding personal growth and change during my treatment. I cannot praise this book enough.

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