

[IMAGE]

## Height, Weight Influence Postmenopausal Breast Cancer?

Breast cancer is the second most common cancer to strike women. (Skin cancer is the most common.) In the United States alone in the year 2000, an estimated 180,000 new cases of breast cancer will be diagnosed, and nearly 40,000 women will die from the disease.

Age, personal history, family history, early menstruation (before age 12), and late pregnancy (after age 30-35) are established risk factors for breast cancer. Increasing evidence suggests that physical characteristics such as height and weight may also play a role. A study published in the *American Journal of Epidemiology* examined the relationship between height, weight and breast cancer risk as part of the Pooling Project of Diet and Cancer, with particular focus on the potential influence of menopausal status. Seven previous studies were analyzed from data on more than 337,000 women with 4,385 incident cases of invasive breast cancer.

Increasing height was associated with increased risk of breast cancer in postmenopausal women. High weight and body-mass index (BMI, a measure of weight in relation to height) were associated with a reduced risk of breast cancer in premenopausal women but with an increased risk in postmenopausal women. The authors emphasize that weight is a modifiable risk factor that represents an “important opportunity for prevention of postmenopausal breast cancer.”

Schedule regular screenings for breast cancer, and talk to your doctor about what you can do to minimize your risk. As these study results suggest, adopting a sensible diet and exercising regularly to maintain a healthy weight may be an important step in the prevention of this horrific disease.

### *Reference:*

Van den Brandt Pa, Spiegelman D, Yaun S-S, et al. Pooled analysis of prospective cohort studies on height, weight, and breast cancer risk. *American Journal of Epidemiology* 2000: Vol. 152, pp514-27.

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