

A photograph of a woman's upper torso. She is wearing a pink, ribbed tank top and has a pink awareness ribbon pinned to her chest. The background is slightly blurred, showing some green foliage.

Understanding your risk: A deep dive into genetic factors for breast cancer

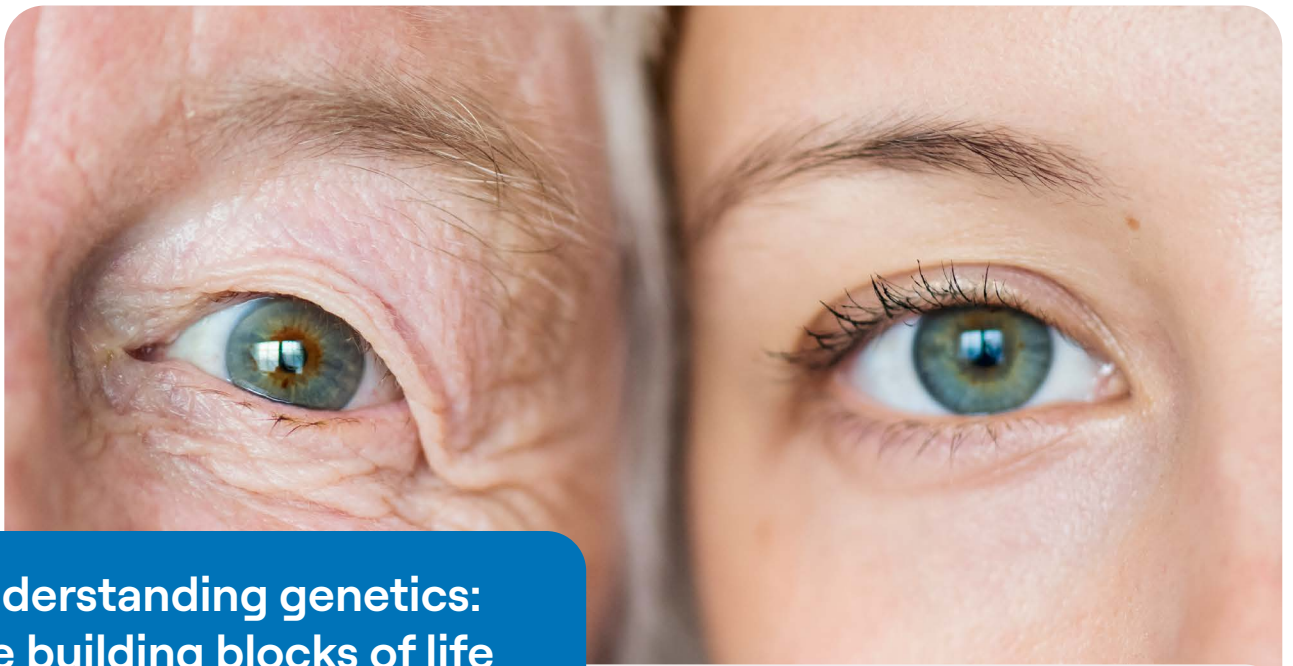
Breast cancer is a disease that touches the lives of millions of people around the world. It's a complex condition with many contributing factors, including genetics. As part of **Breast Cancer Awareness Month**, we're taking a closer look at the genetic factors that can influence breast cancer risk.

Breast cancer: a global concern

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among women worldwide. According to the World Health Organisation, there are about **2.1 million new cases each year**. It's a disease that doesn't discriminate, affecting people of all ages, genders, and backgrounds. However, certain factors can increase your risk, and one of those is genetics.

Breast Cancer Awareness Month: a time for knowledge and action

Every October, we observe Breast Cancer Awareness Month. This is a time to **increase understanding of this disease, debunk myths, and highlight the importance of early detection and treatment.** It's also a time to delve deeper into the factors that contribute to breast cancer, including those written in our very DNA.



Understanding genetics: the building blocks of life

Genetics can seem like a complex and foreign language. But once we break it down, it becomes a powerful tool for understanding our health. Our genes, which are made up of DNA, act as instructions for our body. They determine everything from our eye colour to, in some cases, our risk of developing certain diseases. **When it comes to breast cancer, specific genes play a crucial role.**



The role of BRCA genes in breast cancer

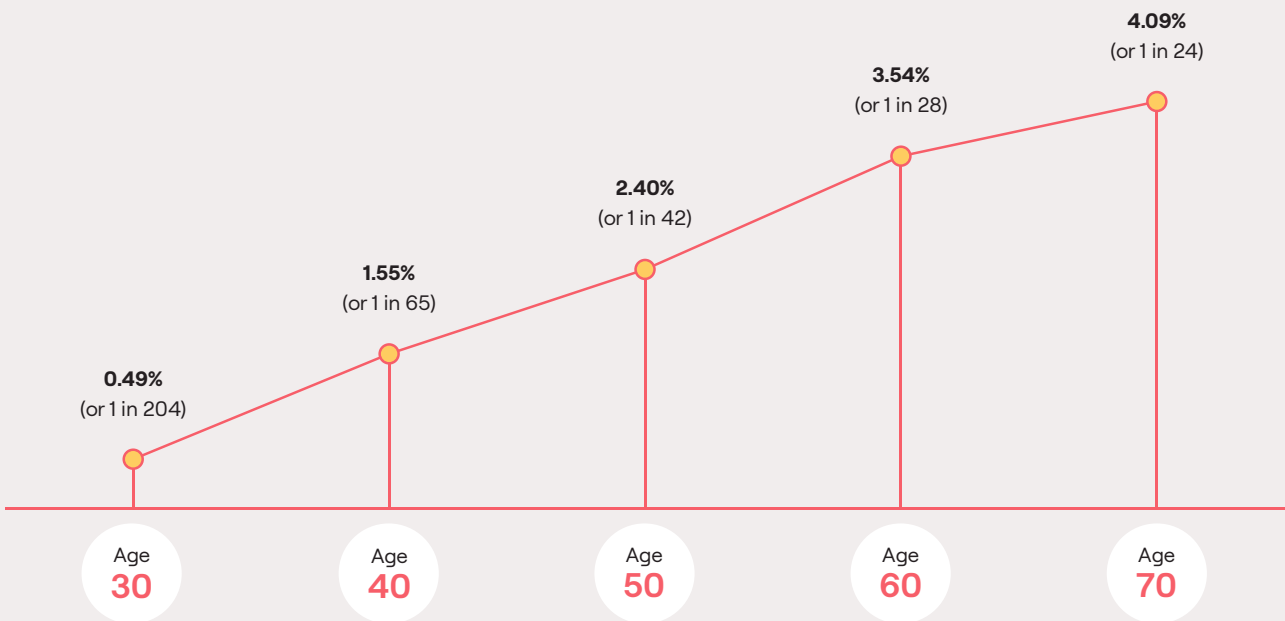
The most well-known genes associated with breast cancer are BRCA1 and BRCA2. Everyone has these genes, but some people carry specific mutations that can increase their risk of developing breast and other cancers. **If you have a family history of breast cancer, particularly among close relatives, this could be a sign of a BRCA mutation in your family.** However, it's important to remember that not everyone with a mutation will develop cancer, and not all breast cancers are caused by these genetic changes.

Are women and men equally affected by breast cancer?

Breast cancer is significantly more common in women than in men on a global scale. According to the World Health Organization, there were 2.3 million women diagnosed with breast cancer and 685,000 deaths globally in 2020. As of the end of 2020, there were 7.8 million women alive who had been diagnosed with breast cancer in the past 5 years, making it the world's most prevalent cancer.

In contrast, men are far less likely to develop breast cancer. It is estimated that approximately 0.5-1% of all breast cancer cases occur in men. Despite the lower incidence, it's crucial for men to be aware of this risk, particularly if there is a family history of the disease.

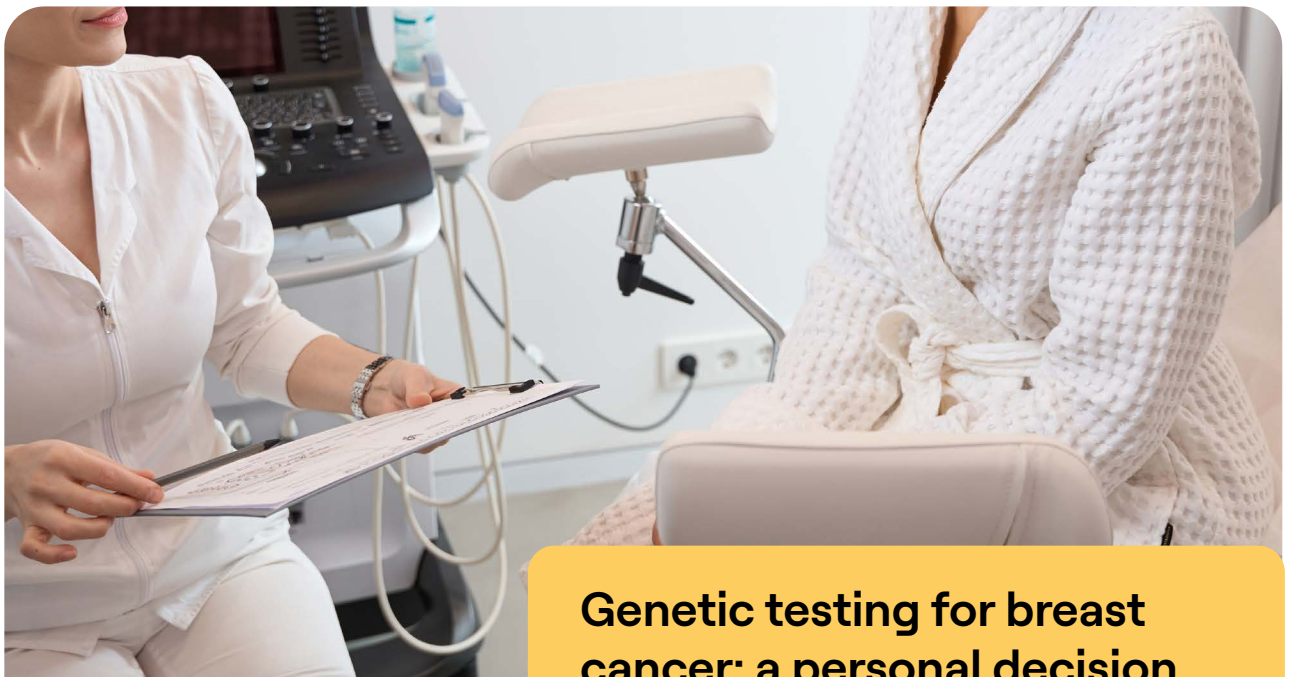
The risk of being diagnosed with breast cancer varies at different ages. For instance, the risk that a woman will be diagnosed with breast cancer during the next 10 years, starting at the following ages, is as follows:



These risks are averages for the whole population. An individual woman's breast cancer risk may be higher or lower depending on known factors, as well as on factors that are not yet fully understood.

Beyond BRCA: other genetic factors

While **BRCA1** and **BRCA2** are the most well-known genes associated with breast cancer, they're not the only ones. Other genes, such as **PALB2, CHEK2, and ATM**, can also increase breast cancer risk. Research is ongoing to identify more genes that may play a role in breast cancer development.



Genetic testing for breast cancer: a personal decision

Genetic testing for BRCA and other mutations linked to breast cancer can provide information about your risk. However, **it's a highly personal decision that should be made in consultation with healthcare professionals, genetic counsellors, and your family.** It's essential to understand the implications of the results, the potential for increased anxiety, and the fact that it doesn't provide a clear-cut answer about whether cancer will develop.

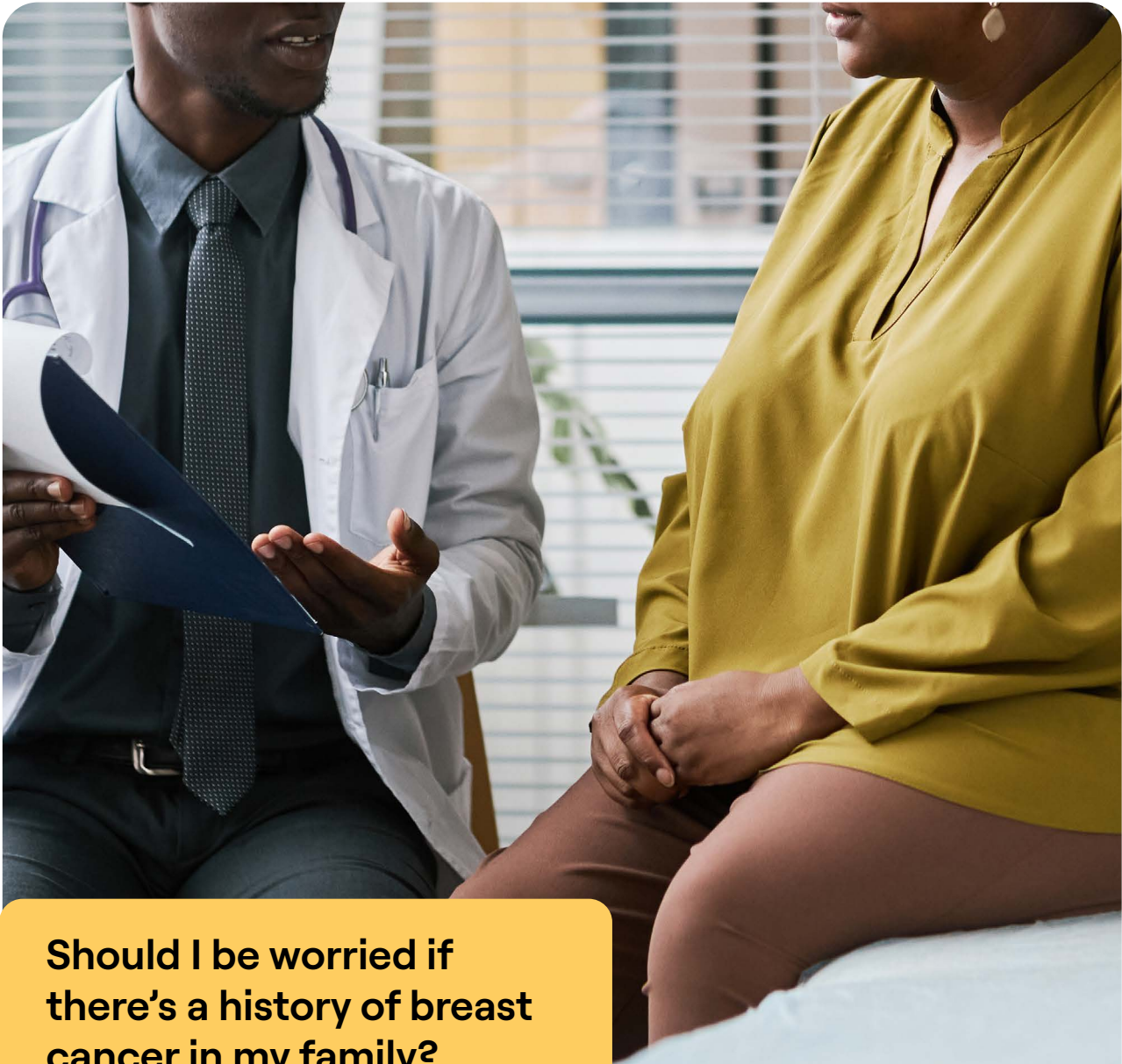
Strategies for reducing risk: taking control of your health

Understanding your genetic risk can feel overwhelming. However, it also opens the door to proactive strategies for reducing your risk. This might include **more frequent screening, lifestyle changes, medications, or, in some cases, preventative surgeries.** Everyone's strategy will be different and should be developed in consultation with healthcare professionals. But the power lies in knowledge and the ability to act.



The power of prevention: lifestyle factors

While you can't change your genetics, you can modify lifestyle factors that contribute to breast cancer risk. This includes maintaining a **healthy weight, staying physically active, eating a balanced diet, limiting alcohol, and avoiding tobacco.** These healthy habits can go a long way in reducing your overall cancer risk.



Should I be worried if there's a history of breast cancer in my family?

A family history of breast cancer can increase your risk, especially if the disease has affected close relatives and occurred at a young age. However, it's important to remember that most people who develop breast cancer do not have a family history of the disease. If you're concerned about your family history, it's a good idea to **discuss this with your doctor or a genetic counsellor.**

Breast Cancer Awareness Month is a call to action for us all. Whether we're personally affected or know someone who is, we all have a role to play. Contact [HealthHero](#) today for more support and advice. We're with you every step of the way.
