

African-American women with type 2 diabetes may have higher risk for ER-neg breast cancer

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Among African-American women, those with type 2 diabetes may have a higher risk of developing estrogen receptor (ER)-negative breast cancer.

The study was published in *Cancer Research*, a journal of the American Association for Cancer Research, by Julie R. Palmer, ScD, associate director of Boston University's Slone Epidemiology Center, professor of epidemiology at Boston University School of Public Health, and associate director for population sciences at the BU-BMC Cancer Center

The majority of [breast](#) cancers are ER-positive; this type of breast cancer is the easiest to treat and has the highest survival rate. African-American women are disproportionally affected by ER-negative breast cancers, with double the incidence as compared to [white women](#), said Palmer.

"We are still trying to understand the basic biological processes that lead to ER-negative breast cancer. One way to do this is to study factors that are more common in an African-American population," added Palmer.

Several studies suggest that [diabetes](#) is a risk factor for breast cancer, and type 2 diabetes is twice as prevalent in African-American women as compared to white women, commented Palmer. One previous study analyzed the association with type 2 diabetes and breast cancer in

African- American women, but did not report results separately for ER-negative and ER-positive breast cancer. How the Study Was Conducted: The analyses conducted by Palmer and colleagues were based on information provided by participants in the Black Women's Health Study (BWHS). The BWHS was established over 20 years ago and utilizes biennial questionnaires to obtain information from 59,000 African-American women from across the United States. Using this large data set, Palmer and colleagues could control for many factors, including age and body mass index (BMI).

"Our results showed statistically significant evidence of an increased risk of ER-negative breast cancer in black women who had type 2 diabetes before they ever had breast cancer, primarily in the women who had diabetes for at least five years," said Palmer. They did not find an association with ER-positive breast cancer in the same cohort. Importantly, the association between type 2 diabetes and ER-negative breast cancer was observed only among women with lower BMI (

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