

Early menopause linked to greater risk for breast, and possibly ovarian cancer

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Some women who experience menopause early—before age 40—have an increased risk of developing breast and ovarian cancer, according to research being presented at [ENDO 2024](#), the Endocrine Society's annual meeting in Boston, Mass.

"There is also higher risk of breast, prostate and colon cancer in relatives of these women," said Corrine Welt, M.D., chief of the Division of Endocrinology, Metabolism and Diabetes at the University of Utah Health in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Welt and colleagues began the study with the hypothesis that some women with [primary ovarian insufficiency](#) and their family members might be predisposed to reproductive or hormone-related cancers. Primary ovarian insufficiency is a condition that occurs when a woman's ovaries stop working normally prior to age 40.

The researchers identified 613 women with primary ovarian insufficiency and 165 women who experienced [early menopause](#) from two health care systems in Utah that serve 85% of the population. The researchers reviewed medical records dated 1995–2021.

They used Utah Population Database genealogy information to find relatives and focused on cancer diagnoses among the women and their family members using the Utah Cancer Registry. Specifically, the researchers looked at those who were diagnosed with breast, ovarian, endometrial, colon, testicular, and prostate cancers.

They discovered that women with early menopause had two times greater risk for breast cancer. This risk was increased by almost four times (borderline risk) for [ovarian cancer](#).

Breast cancer risk was increased 1.3 times and [colon cancer](#) by 1.5 times in second-degree relatives (i.e., aunts, uncles, grandparents, nieces, or nephews, etc.).

Prostate cancer was increased by 1.3–1.6 times in first-, second-, and third-degree relatives (i.e., great grandfathers, first cousins).

"Women who have infertility from low egg numbers or experience early menopause should make sure they are regularly screened for breast cancer, especially if they have family members with cancer," Welt said.

"Doctors who practice general medicine, gynecology and fertility treatment should be aware that early menopause increases risk for a number of diseases, and they should now be aware that [breast cancer](#) may be one of these diseases to watch for."

Provided by The Endocrine Society

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