

For one year or more...
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International research studies confirm that breastfeeding most likely leads to a slight reduction in a woman's chance of getting breast cancer, if the total length of time she breastfeeds is one year or more. This one year can be for one child or more than one child. For example, breastfeeding two children for six months each would give the same degree of protection against breast cancer as breastfeeding one child for one year. ***The longer a woman breastfeeds in general, the greater the decrease in her risk of breast cancer.*** This is because breastfeeding changes the balance of hormones that a woman has in her body which includes the female sex hormones, such as estrogen. Most research studies have found that estrogen levels are lower in women who are breastfeeding because breastfeeding delays the re-starting of a woman's menstrual periods after childbirth. And this may help to reduce the chance of breast cancer starting to develop.

Breast cancer is unfortunately a common disease and the number one killer of Saudi women. It is important to recognize that more women than ever before in the western nations are surviving breast cancer due to better awareness, screening, and improved treatments. There this is helping women find the cancer in earlier and more treatable stages.

What can make a difference in Saudi women developing breast cancer in the first place?

Breast cancer is thought to be caused by complex interactions between our genes, lifestyle and environment. Risk factors are things that may alter the chances of getting the disease. Having one or more risk factor does not necessarily mean that you will get breast cancer – it means that the chances of you developing the disease are greater or smaller. Often there is not a clear cut-off point when it comes to having or not having many of the established risk factors: there is often a gradual increase or decrease in risk.

Health professionals think that you should decide for yourself whether to breastfeed your baby or not. Your decision should take into account the benefits for both you and your child and the practical issues associated with breastfeeding. These include how easy and convenient you find it to breastfeed. Your lactation consultant will be able to provide you with more information about breastfeeding.

The research studies show that the risk of breast cancer is slightly lower among women who have breastfed their babies for a year or more in total. You might feel, therefore, that if or when you have children, this is an important factor in deciding about breastfeeding. There are many important benefits from breastfeeding for both mother and child. International Health Organizations recommend that women breastfeed for the first six months of an infant's life as it provides all the nutrients a baby needs as well as antibodies to help fight illness and infection.