

# GLAMOUR

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## 4. Make Smart Reproductive Health Choices

◆▶ “Too much estrogen probably plays a greater role in the development of breast cancer than anything else,” says Dr. Coyle. Three well-documented risk factors—starting your period before age 12, reaching menopause after 55 and having your first child after 30—all steep breast cells in estrogen for a longer-than-average amount of time.

Luckily, there are some ways to lower your risk with reproductive health choices that cut down on estrogen exposure. Breast-feeding, for example, lowers breast cancer risk, even among women who give birth later in life. And pregnancy timing counts. “As a breast doctor, I say, if you have a choice, have your first baby in your twenties,” says Dr. Love.

As for estrogen in the Pill, most doctors agree that hormonal contraceptives slightly increase breast cancer risk. But Pill users, especially those under 40, shouldn't panic: “The risk of breast cancer in your twenties or thirties is so low that even if it doubled, it would be slight,” says Dr. Love. “I'm more worried about someone older taking the Pill, when her baseline risk is greater.” New York City ob-gyn Adelaide Nardone, M.D., agrees: “I give the lowest dose of oral contraceptives in general, and steer older women toward the nonhormonal IUD.” Women with a family history of breast cancer should talk to their ob-gyns, but doctors *Glamour* interviewed say that for most young women, the Pill's benefits outweigh the small rise in breast cancer risk.

## 5. Get More Vitamin D

◆▶ No particular diet has been proven to lower breast cancer risk, but a growing number of studies point to a nutrient that seems especially beneficial: vitamin D. One such study found that women who got the most calcium and D had a 35 percent lower risk of breast cancer than those who got the least. Unfortunately, nearly 75 percent of us may have insufficient levels of the vitamin. You can get some from fortified dairy products and fish, but many experts now think taking 1,000 IU of the vitamin daily may be best for women.

## COULD BREAST CANCER DISAPPEAR ON ITS OWN?

There's an intriguing bit of research that has the breast cancer world buzzing: Results from a Norwegian study of 200,000 women suggest that in about 20 percent of cases, small cancerous changes and tumors in women's breasts may vanish—without treatment.

How? There are several theories, but “it's possible that our immune system takes care of them,” says Dr. Coyle. The finding could mean that some women go through unnecessary treatment for breast cancers that were never going to hurt them in the first place, says Lisa Schwartz, M.D., a professor of medicine at the Dartmouth Institute in Hanover, New Hampshire. But doctors may also eventually be able to identify early which types of tumors will fizzle and which will ignite—information that might spare women pointless trauma and eventually help scientists develop a cure. ■

## HAVE TWO MINUTES? HELP FIND A CURE

One maddening problem facing cancer researchers: It often takes years—even decades—to recruit enough subjects for a thorough study. To help solve that, Susan Love, M.D., has partnered with the Avon Foundation for Women to create the Love/Avon Army of Women. The aim: to recruit a million study volunteers. (Reese Witherspoon is number 278,027.) Think of it like being in the Army Reserve: Sign up, and you may get a “call to action” e-mail. For some studies you may need to fill out a health diary; others may require checkups at a local hospital. The group is already speeding the progress toward a cure: “One study had been recruiting since 2002 and still needed 2,000 women,” says Dr. Love. “We got them in two months!” Sign up at [armyofwomen.org](http://armyofwomen.org).

