

# Fact Sheet

Q&A: BREAST CANCER AND ABORTION

ABORTION  
LAW  
REFORM  
ASSOCIATION  
NEW ZEALAND

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## **Question**

*If I have an abortion will it put me at risk of getting breast cancer?*

## **Answer**

*No. Abortion (spontaneous or induced) does not increase the risk of your developing breast cancer.*

## **Facts**

Many studies with strong research designs conducted throughout the world with hundreds of thousands of women unanimously conclude that women who have had either spontaneous or induced abortions do not have a subsequent elevated risk for developing breast cancer. These conclusions are supported by the World Health Organisation (WHO 2000) and by the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG 2004).

In 2003, the U.S. National Cancer Institute (NCI), held the Early Reproductive Events and Breast Cancer Workshop. More than 100 of the world's leading experts on pregnancy and breast cancer risk attended. The experts reviewed studies and found that:

- Breast cancer risk is increased for a short time after a pregnancy resulting in the birth of a living child
- Neither induced nor spontaneous abortions are linked to an rise in breast cancer risk (NCI 2003).

In August 2003, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists' (ACOG) Committee on Gynecologic Practice also reviewed the available evidence and published its own findings, which agreed with the NCI Workshop conclusions: "More rigorous recent studies argue against a causal relationship between induced abortion and a subsequent increase in breast cancer risk" (ACOG 2003). That is, an abortion does not cause you get breast cancer.

## **Background**

How a study is designed affects its results and conclusions. Studies that compare women with and without breast cancer encounter the problem of recall bias when they ask women to remember or recall their abortions. Studies show that recall bias is a concern because of the stigma attached to abortion.

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Healthy women tend to underreport past abortions while women with breast cancer tend to accurately report their reproductive history as they search for causes of their cancer.

Factors known to increase a woman's chance of developing breast cancer include age (a woman's chance of developing breast cancer increases as she gets older), family history of breast cancer, early age at first menstrual period, late age at menopause, late age at the time of birth of her first full-term baby and certain breast conditions. Obesity is also a risk factor for breast cancer in postmenopausal women (NCI 2008). Exercise and decreased exposure to estrogen over one's reproductive years may be protective factors against breast cancer.