Breast cancer risk increases with age. Heavy women also face a greater danger. Now, research outlines how much these factors add up. Among postmenopausal women, obesity increases the risk for breast cancer by as much as 58 percent. That’s according to a study of more than 65,000 women ages 50 and older followed for more than a decade. What’s more, extra pounds at this age seems to make breast cancer more serious. Obese women with breast cancer tended to have larger tumors and cancer that had spread to their lymph nodes. They also contained more of the types of cells that grow and spread quickly.

Beyond a Bigger Waistline

Fat tissue doesn’t merely cling to your hips. So-called adipose tissue secretes hormones, which research shows affect breast cancer risk.

The changes your body goes through during menopause heighten the danger. Your breast tissue evolves to contain more fat than in your younger years. Adding more pounds—and hormones—during this shift may set the stage for malignant cell growth.

Stop the Spread

Fortunately, you’re not destined to expand in middle age. Changes to your everyday lifestyle can ward off the weight gain that sometimes accompanies menopause, potentially cutting your cancer risk. For instance:

✔ Sweat. Aim for 150 minutes of moderate movement per week. Pick activities you enjoy, such as walking or dancing.

✔ Build strength. Pick up some weights to build muscle and boost your metabolism. Search online for “strength exercises” to get sample moves.

✔ Watch your portions. In general, you’ll need about 200 fewer calories per day than you did before age 50. Using smaller plate, bowl, and glass can help you cut back without thinking.

✔ Pack in nutrients. Make each meal count with vitamin-rich foods like fatty fish, berries, and dark leafy greens.