

## Pink ribbon day

### *The Health Column*

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Breast cancer has been found to be the most common cancer in Australian women (excluding non-melanoma skin cancer), with one in eight women diagnosed by 85 years of age.

The ongoing battle to find cures for breast and gynaecological cancers, and to support those women suffering from them, is highlighted with the immensely popular and successful Pink Ribbon Day held this month.

The Cancer Council's Pink Ribbon Day helps raise funds to support the many thousands of women affected by breast and gynaecological cancers and aims to minimise the threat of women's cancers through successful prevention, best treatment, support and world-class cancer research.

Pink Ribbon Day is a day when all Australians can come together to show their support for these cancer sufferers.

There are a number of risk factors associated with breast cancers, some of which can be modified and some which cannot. Many people have at least one risk factor but will never develop breast cancer, while others with breast cancer may have had no known risk factors.

While the causes of breast cancer are not fully understood, there are a number of factors associated with the risk of developing the disease. Some of the risk factors for breast cancer include:

- being a woman
- increasing age
- having a strong family history of breast cancer.
- having a breast condition such as a personal history of breast cancer, ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS) or lobular carcinoma in situ (LCIS)
- a number of hormonal factors, child-bearing history, personal and lifestyle.

Pink Ribbon Day is most commonly associated with breast cancers but the funds raised also go to research and provide support for women suffering from gynaecological cancer. These forms of cancer are named according to the organ or part of the body where they first develop, including ovary, uterus, cervix, vagina and vulva.



The most common forms of gynaecological cancer are:

- Ovarian cancer—begins in one or both ovaries, a pair of solid, oval-shaped organs producing hormones and eggs (ova).
- Uterine cancer—begins in the main body of the uterus, a hollow organ about the size and shape of an upside-down pear. The uterus is where the baby grows when a woman is pregnant.
- Cervical cancer—begins in the cervix, the lower, cylinder-shaped part of the uterus. Its upper margin is connected to the uterus, while its lower margin is connected to the vagina.
- Vaginal cancer—begins in the vagina (also called the birth canal), a muscular tube-like channel that extends from the cervix to the external part of the females sex organs (vulva).
- Vulval cancer—begins in the vulva, the outer part of the female reproductive system. It includes the opening of the vagina, the inner and outer lips (also called labia minora and labia majora), the clitoris and the mons pubis (soft, fatty mound of tissue, above the labia).

The causes of many gynaecological cancers are not fully understood, but there are a number of factors associated with the risk of developing one or more types of gynaecological cancer.

These risk factors include increasing age, having a strong family history, identified gene mutations, reproductive history such as child-bearing and exposure to hormones – produced by the body or taken as medication. Other risk factors can include exposure to diethylstilbestrol (DES) in the womb, viral infection such as human papilloma virus (HPV), and lifestyle factors such as smoking and those leading to excess body weight.

Your local community pharmacy is your health destination and you can get more detailed information on topics such as *breast awareness* and *pap smear* available from pharmacies providing the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia's Self Care health information program.

For the nearest Self Care pharmacy location phone the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia on 1300 369 772, or go to [www.psa.org.au](http://www.psa.org.au) 'Supporting practice' then 'Self Care', and then 'Find a Self Care pharmacy'.