

BUST A MOVE

HERE'S YOUR GUIDE TO KEEPING "THE GIRLS" HEALTHY AND CANCER-FREE, JUST IN TIME FOR BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH. **By Celia Shatzman**

Don't let the statistics fool you: studies have found that despite having lower rates of breast cancer than Caucasian women, Latinas are more likely to be diagnosed at a younger age but a later stage, when tumors tend to be more aggressive—and among U.S. Latinas, breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed form of cancer. But there are steps you can take to ward off the disease, says Mariana Chavez-MacGregor, M.D., M.Sc., an assistant professor in the department of breast medical oncology at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston.

► Get regular screenings

Begin getting annual mammograms at age 40. "There's no data on any benefit of starting mammograms before 40, because younger women's breasts tend to be more dense," making it harder to detect tumors, Dr. Chavez-MacGregor explains. Because Latinas are more often diagnosed at an earlier age, in your 20s and 30s have your doctor check your breasts manually as part of regular checkups.

► Know your genetic history

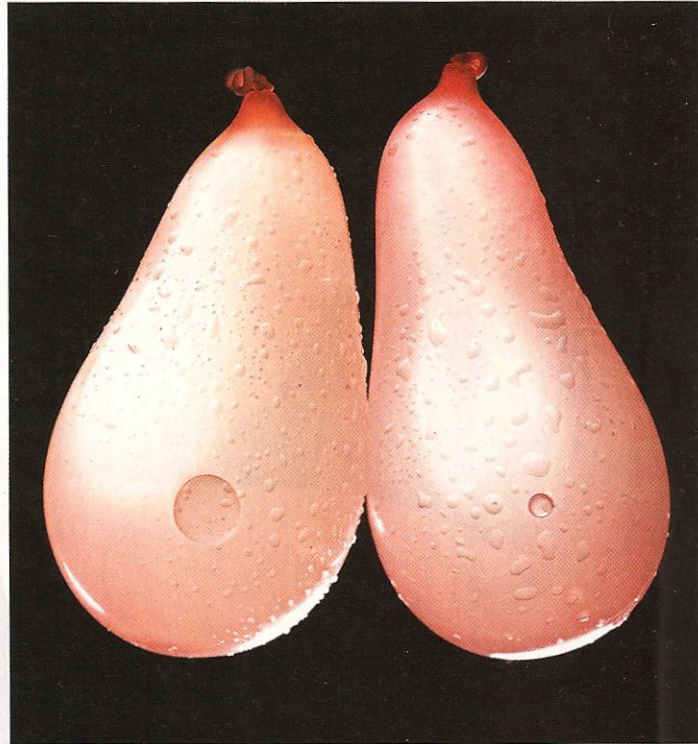
Women with a family history of the disease, or who are carriers of the BRCA1 or 2 genes (which make women more susceptible to breast cancer), should discuss prevention strategies with their doctors in their 20s or early 30s, since they may need to start mammograms earlier.

► Examine your breasts

Though studies have found that it doesn't improve mortality, many doctors still recommend self-exams, just in case. "If a woman knows what is normal for her breasts and how they feel, she will be more likely to know if something is wrong," Dr. Chavez-MacGregor says.

► Avoid harmful chemicals

Limit your exposure to hormone-disrupting chemicals, such as bisphenol A (BPA), which is found in many hard plastics and epoxy resins, and used in some food and drink packaging, water and infant bottles, and medical devices (just look for the "BPA-free" logo). BPA's molecular structure resembles estrogen, and higher estrogen levels are linked to a higher risk of breast cancer.



► Hit the gym

Researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill found that women who exercised 10 to 19 hours a week lowered their risk of breast cancer by 30 percent, but working out less than that can still decrease the odds. "Women who are overweight or obese have higher levels of circulating hormones, and that relates to breast cancer," Dr. Chavez-MacGregor says.

► Don't panic

If you're diagnosed with breast cancer, stay calm. "We've come a long way," says Dr. Chavez-MacGregor. There are new drugs to treat women at earlier stages, as well as therapies designed to combat particu-

ONE IN 11
Latinas will be diagnosed with breast cancer during her lifetime, according to the American Cancer Society.

lar types of breast cancer. There are less invasive surgical techniques, better ways to deliver radiation therapy and better medications to treat nausea and other side effects of chemotherapy.



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