

Ten Ways to Help Prevent Breast Cancer

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1. Avoid (HRT) Hormone Replacement Therapy. Synthetic HRT increases the risk of Breast Cancer. In 2002, a huge double blind placebo study called "Women's Health Initiative" sponsored by the World Health Organization (WHO) was stopped early because it was proven during the study that HRT causes breast cancer.

Natural Bio-identical hormones on the other hand are safe. They are made from botanical plants such as soy and yams. These plants are pharmaceutically processed to produce natural bio-identical progesterone or estrogen derivatives; they may come in cream or oral forms.

It is not difficult to determine if one needs some form of hormone balancing – if you feel perfectly well and have no symptoms listed below it is very unlikely that you need to do or change anything. However, a large number of peri-menopausal women that come to our clinic suffer from the following symptoms: fatigue, pre-menstrual breast tenderness, fibrocystic breast condition, short menstrual cycle (less than 28 days), anxiety, headaches, sleep disorders, low libido, depression and PMS. Women in menopause may have some of these symptoms in addition to hot flashes, vaginal dryness, and memory problems. If some of these complaints are present in a patient it is important to identify any hormonal deficiencies.

We can carefully monitor most hormone levels with blood tests, although they are not as reliable as saliva tests, which measure bio-available free-hormone levels, or 24-hour urine collection, which looks at what is excreted through metabolites over a 24 hour period. Unfortunately, saliva and urine tests are not covered by OHIP at this time. Once identified, single or multiple hormone deficiencies can be corrected by the use of bio-identical hormones, which have an anti-aging action by the nature of their action.

The effect of these hormones is dose specific, however in nature more is not necessarily better – if the hormones are prescribed in too high a dosage, they can cause adverse effects. Many women hearing of the great effects of progesterone decide to self medicate, a word of caution here needs to be made – some progesterone products on the market have very little or no effect. Compounding pharmacies have a reliable and consistent product; however this would require a prescription from your doctor. One of the best books on the subject was published by Dr. John Lee called "What Your Doctor May Not Tell You About Breast Cancer". For additional information on bio-identical hormones and breast cancer prevention you can visit www.drpettle.com.

2. Limit or avoid birth control pills. Even the weakest pill contains seven times the amount of estrogen naturally occurring in your body. Research has determined that the single greatest risk factor for future development of breast cancer is lifetime exposure of the breasts to estrogen. It would appear that controlling the influence of estrogen on the breasts would be the single most important method of primary breast cancer prevention.

It was not until 1905 that Theodoor Hendrik Van de Velde, a Dutch gynecologist, showed that women only ovulate once per menstrual cycle. In the 1920s, Kyusaku Ogino, a Japanese gynecologist, and Hermann Knaus, from Austria, independently discovered that ovulation occurs about fourteen days before the next menstrual period. Thus the Knaus-Ogino or the Rhythm (or Calendar) method is one of the 'biological' forms of birth control. A couple avoids unprotected sexual intercourse just before, during and just after ovulation. For over 100 years, the Rhythm Method was promoted by the Catholic Church as the only morally acceptable form of family planning. Ovulation occurs about 14 days before the start of a woman's period. Since sperm can live inside the vagina for up to 3 days, and an egg can stay fertile in the fallopian tubes and vagina for up to 3 days, unprotected intercourse must be avoided for more than just the day of ovulation. To be safe, a woman should abstain from sex (or use a condom) 5 days before ovulation, and 5 days after. The effectiveness of the rhythm method depends on how meticulously it is practiced. The study, published in the June 1998 issue of the *Journal of Reproductive Medicine*, found the technique had an impressive 96% effectiveness rate in preventing pregnancy, comparing favorably to other methods of contraception. Women must keep track of three things: their core body temperature, the fertile days of their cycle as measured by a calendar, and their cervical secretions. This may prove challenging to those women with irregular menstrual cycles who may have to address this issue first. Let's face it, it's a lot easier for a physician to prescribe a birth control pill that will also 'regulate' a woman's cycle than it is to discuss natural forms of birth control, and to treat the underlying cause of menstrual irregularity. Although it is more challenging to discuss this issue, especially with younger women, I have found that it is always worth the effort to get someone off the pill. For further information on the Rhythm Method visit http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhythm_Method

3. Limit your exposure to xeno-estrogens like Ethinyl Estradiol used in contraceptives, or Methoxychlor a pesticide that replaced the well known DDT, industrial pollutants such as Bisphenol-A used as a plasticizer, all man made radiation, pesticides and herbicides, as well as many toxic cleaning products that mimic estrogen with their molecular structure. Since hormone-disrupting chemicals mimic estrogen, it is suspected they are linked to the growing incidence of breast cancer. While researchers are only beginning to understand the health effects of these chemicals, they have already observed that hormone disruptions can result in damage to the brain, immune and reproductive systems. Very few ingredients are tested for reproductive or developmental effects caused by hormone disrupting chemicals.

Purchase non-bleached coffee filters, paper, napkins, toilet tissue, etc. The Environmental Protection Agency in the United States has determined that using bleached coffee filters alone can result in a lifetime exposure to dioxin that exceeds acceptable risks. Ask for office paper products whitened without chlorine.

Use tampons and sanitary napkins made of organic cotton without chlorine. (The FDA detected dioxins and dozens of other substances in conventional tampons.) Look for ones that contain no chlorine, fragrance, wax, surfactants, rayon, etc.

Do not use chlorine bleach for household cleaning or laundry. Hydrogen peroxide is a safe alternative; it breaks down to water and oxygen. Bleaches made from Hydrogen Peroxide are sold in Health Food stores.

Use non-toxic household products. Lysol Disinfectant Spray may contain ortho-phenylphenol. This germ killer is carcinogenic, according to both the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and IARC. You can find non-toxic products in your health food store. Cancer Prevention Coalition provides well researched information on avoidable exposures to consumers, environmental risks, and many other topic related publications and resources at www.preventcancer.com.

Use only natural underarm deodorants that are free of dangerous chemicals. Avoid antiperspirants, which contain aluminum, as aluminum is toxic. In fact, one should avoid antiperspirants altogether as they inhibit detoxification of the breasts and chest area. Underarm perspiration is an important way the body clears toxins out of the breast area.

Avoid fluoridated toothpaste (toothpaste without fluoride and containing natural ingredients may be purchased at most health food stores). Avoid fluoridated water and all chemically treated tap water. Drink filtered not "city water" that contains chlorine or get a whole house filter. Bathe or shower in "clean" water. Fluoride can be just as poisonous as lead and just slightly less poisonous than arsenic.

For more information on the effects of fluoride visit www.fluoridealert.org an international coalition to end water fluoridation and alert people to fluoride's health and environmental risks.

Many cosmetic products including lipstick contain lead and xenoestrogens. Brands without these suspect chemicals include Aubrey Organics, Dr. Hauschka, Logona and Weleda just to name a few, as well as many health food store brands.

Synthetic hair dyes increase the risk for certain types of cancers. One-fifth of cases of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma among women are linked to hair-dye use. Researchers conducting the study at the Catalan Institute of Oncology in Barcelona analyzed data from six European countries and found a 19 percent increase of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma cases among people who said they used hair dye. The risk increased to 26 percent for those who colored their hair 12 or more times a year. Indeed, more than a dozen studies link hair dyes with cancer, yet there are no warning labels of this hazard on these products. Certain natural dyes may be safer because they use vegetable colors. "Behind The Label" at http://www.theecologist.org/archive_detail.asp?content_id=485 provides a very comprehensive list of various ingredients used in coloring agents and cosmetics.

4. Regulate your estrogen metabolism. Since most breast tumors are estrogen receptor positive, it implies that they are partially fed by estrogen. Some estrogens are cancer protective, while some are cancer permissive – they are not all created equal. Keep your E-2/16 ratio in check. A simple urine test can provide you with this information. The lower the amount of (bad) estrogen, the slower the potential growth. Therapeutic use of I3C or DIM has been clinically shown to be very beneficial to keep your E2/16 ratio in a healthy zone. The most important advice for preventing cancer is to maintain and enhance your liver's ability to metabolize estrogens from different sources. This can be done through proper nutrition and requires very specific concentrations of nutrients and occasional liver support and detoxification. This is a continuous and life-long prevention program. The ultimate goal here is to improve your estrogen metabolism. Several homeopathic medications come to mind when I think about improving liver function:

BRYONIA ALBA (Wild Hops) – A very well know liver aid for centuries. Also happens to be a superb remedy for pain in breasts at menstrual period since it helps with estrogen metabolism. Breasts may be hot and painfully hard pre-menstrually. These patients will often experience menstrual irregularities, with gastric symptoms. Bryonia is often helpful with intermenstrual pain, with great abdominal and pelvic soreness.

CARDUUS MARIANUS (St. Mary's Thistle) - The action of this medication is centered in the liver, and portal system. Has specific relation to the vascular system and varicose veins often seen as a consequence of abuse of alcoholic beverages. Cardus works very well alleviating pelvic congestion usually occurring with endometriosis.

CHELIDONIUM MAJUS (Celandine) - A prominent liver remedy, covering many of the direct symptoms of that organ. Patient will have an orange or yellow pigmentation of her skin, and not surprisingly frequent pain under inferior angle of right scapula due to gallstones or inflamed gall bladder. This patient will most likely suffer from spastic pains and lameness in single parts. She will suffer from great general lethargy and will avoid activity of any sort.

NATRIUM SULPHURICUM (Sulphate of Sodium) - A liver remedy, especially indicated where the complaints are due to living in damp houses or basements. These patients are worse in rainy weather, water in any form. They feel every change from dry to wet; cannot even eat plants grown near water, nor fish. They always feel best in warm, dry air. They frequently have swollen ankles due to their sluggish liver function.

NUX VOMICA or **COLUBRINA** (Poison-nut) - Nux is the remedy for many of the conditions frequently associated with modern life. The typical Nux patient is rather thin, quick, active, nervous, and irritable. This patient will be doing a good deal of mental work; has mental strains and leads a sedentary life, found in prolonged office work, with its cares and anxieties. This indoor life and mental strain seeks stimulants, coffee, and wine, usually in excess.

5. Exercise. Studies show that three to four hours per week of regular exercise can decrease your risk of Breast Cancer by up to 50%. Lean body mass (muscle) does not generate estrogen like fatty tissue. Swimming laps, aerobics, and running are considered strenuous. Vigorous fitness training of sufficient intensity is an effective modulator of mammary angiogenesis. However any form of exercise will affect the endocrine system by balancing one's hormone levels, increasing the levels of HGH (human growth hormone) naturally while aiding the lymphatic system in detoxification of your body. Physical exercise represents a simple, non-invasive, non-chemical, inexpensive means of cancer prevention.

6. Nutrition. Eating a low saturated fat - high fiber diet has been shown to be beneficial for breast health. Supplement with ground flaxseed as they contain lignans that bind to estrogens in your digestive tract and cleanse them from your system. Eat foods high in anti-oxidants (vitamins A, C, E, selenium, beta carotene) to protect the body from toxic exposures. (Deeply colored vegetables and fruits like green leafy vegetables, kale, carrots, yams, sweet potatoes, broccoli, and cauliflower, brussel sprouts, collards, cabbage, citrus, berries, nuts and seeds.)

Avoid excessive amounts of sugar, fat, alcohol, caffeine - all of which decrease immune system function and may contribute to cancer. Obesity, and high levels of insulin in the blood also increase your risk for cancer. My personal preference for cancer protective diet is a plant based diet. The typical Western diet with its incessant emphasis on protein is one of the major causes of cancer and cardiovascular disease: the two leading causes of death. Animal protein, including dairy is full of hormones, antibiotics and toxic feeds that are given to livestock to make them grow fast - after all we're not buying cows and chickens based on their personality traits - we purchase them by their weight. Have you ever wondered that the average size of a chicken breast has increased by eight fold in the past fifty years? Surely it is not because we are being nice to chickens - they are grown on steroids and we consume this flesh. Plant based diets are much safer, with less hormonal influence and more minerals, vitamins and fiber that we all need. In his best selling book "The China Study" T. Colin Campbell, PhD makes a very convincing argument with his fifty years of nutritional research regarding plant-based diets. I strongly recommend this book to anyone interested in this subject; it has certainly opened my eyes.

7. Learn to do your own regular breast self-examinations as a great majority of lumps are found by women themselves. A health care professional should examine any changes noticed. Women are generally reluctant to do a breast self-exam and for many the experience is frustrating - you may feel things but not know what they mean. However, the more you examine your breasts, the more you will learn about them and the easier it will become for you to tell if something unusual has occurred. Try to get in the habit of doing breast self-examination at least once a month to familiarize yourself with how your breasts normally look and feel. Examine yourself several days after your period ends, when your breasts are least likely to be swollen and tender. If you are no longer having periods, choose a day that's easy to remember, such as the first or last day of the month.

8. "Other-centered" people, who do things for others before they look after their own needs, must learn to say NO. Start to look after yourself before giving all to others. Become assertive in a positive way. The common thread in cancer patients is unfulfilled passion that had been suppressed for many years. This pattern of suppression would repeat itself over their lifetime. Oddly enough, studying piano later in life, or fulfilling another previously unfulfilled passion has an amazing transformational effect.

9. Check your thyroid. Hypothyroidism precedes most breast disease. By correcting this problem as early as the first symptoms develop you will decrease your risk factors and improve your breast health. Women are eight times more likely to suffer from a dysfunctional thyroid during their lifetime than men. Most thyroid conditions start in the perimenopausal and menopausal stages, when the endocrine system experiences many changes. A woman with an under-active thyroid may experience one or a combination of the symptoms such as: fatigue, dry skin, constipation, cold intolerance including cold hands and feet, puffy face in the morning, swollen or drooping eyes, loss or dry brittle hair, low sex drive, weight gain or inability to lose weight, memory loss, yellow discoloration on skin and palms, PMS, as well as muscle aches.

Proper assessment will lead to the correct diagnosis and treatment, however this is where things get a little tricky for some people. Conventional blood test looking at your TSH (Thyroid Stimulating Hormone) levels may be misleading. Elevated TSH levels indicate an under-active (hypo) thyroid, and low TSH levels indicate an over-active (hyper) thyroid. Canadian 'normal' values are between 0.35 - 5.0. When the TSH levels are within this normal range, it is assumed that the thyroid gland is healthy and functioning normally. However, this "normal" range of health is much too broad. In the United States TSH levels over 3.0 are considered hypothyroid. Some physicians suggest that TSH results of less than 1 and over 2, combined with the

presence of clinical symptoms, shows that there is a thyroid dysfunction, which may require treatment. In addition, two other tests that may be done are called "T4" and "T3". It is not unusual to see T-3 and or T-4 levels to be low or in the low end of 'normal' values thus requiring a more detailed look with additional saliva testing.

Keep in mind that pregnancy, estrogen replacement therapy, birth control pills, and especially stress may interfere with these results. Iodine and Selenium are co-factors in thyroid metabolism. A deficiency of these and other essential nutrients may be responsible for certain symptoms, as they all play a role in optimizing the health of the thyroid. Lacking these essential nutrients perpetuates a thyroid problem at the cellular level although TSH lab values may seem normal. Many people remain undiagnosed and untreated because many health practitioners rely solely on these numerical values. The most important factor - the patient's symptoms – has to be taken into consideration.

10. In addition to your regular medical breast examinations, consider regular breast screening with Thermography. Breast Thermography is radiation free, non-invasive and totally safe and painless process of providing women with true screening methods that can warn of a pending problem far in advance. Thermographic imaging is a predictive test, and it can also monitor the effectiveness of treatments to see the effects on the breast tissue. Proper risk assessment with the use of thermography can help provide you with the early warnings you need to make the necessary changes to become proactive.

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