

Wellness: Prevention May Keep Disease Away

Breast cancer prevention starts with your own health habits, including staying physically active, limiting alcohol and eating right. Research has proven that eating healthy and exercising regularly – three to four hours per week at a moderate or higher level – contributes to breast cancer prevention. And if you combine these risk-reducing habits with limiting your exposure to substances that promote the disease, you can benefit even more. Nothing you do can guarantee your life will be cancer-free. But if you practice healthy habits and consult your doctor about extra measures you can take, you can at least reduce your risk. Here are some suggestions to start doing today:



Stay physically active. No matter what your age, aim for at least 30 minutes of exercise on most days. Try to include weight-bearing exercises, including walking, jogging or dancing. These have the added benefit of keeping your bones strong.

Eat the right food. Increase the amount of fruits, vegetables, calcium and whole grains into your diet. Avoid high-fat foods, processed sweets, red meat, full-fat dairy products and fried foods.

Emphasize olive oil. Oleic acid, the main component of olive oil, appears both to suppress the action of the most important *oncogene* in breast cancer and to increase the effectiveness of the drug *Herceptin*.

Limit alcohol. Drinking alcohol is strongly linked to breast cancer. The type of alcohol consumed seems to make no difference. Limit the amount of alcohol you drink to less than one drink a day, or avoid it completely.

Maintain a healthy weight. There's a clear link between obesity and breast cancer. The association is stronger if you gain the weight later in life, particularly after menopause.

Avoid long-term hormone therapy. The link between postmenopausal hormone therapy and breast cancer has been a subject of debate for years, partly because research results have been mixed. Talk with your doctor about discontinuing long-term hormone therapy.

Avoid exposure to pesticides. The molecular structure of some pesticides closely resembles that of estrogen. This means they may attach to receptor sites in your body. Although studies have not found a definite link between most pesticides and breast cancer, it is known that women with elevated levels of pesticides in their breast tissue have a greater breast cancer risk.

Birth control. According to the Mayo Clinic, there's no evidence of an across-the-board link between birth control pill use and breast cancer risk. Analysis of combined data from many older studies suggests a slight increase in risk of premenopausal breast cancer. The pills used in these studies, however, include preparations that contained higher estrogen doses than what is available in preparations prescribed today. The analysis of

these older oral contraceptives also showed that women who took the pill for four or more years before their first full-term pregnancy had a larger increase in premenopausal breast cancer risk. Still, experts analyzing all the risk data estimate that birth control pill use causes, at most, 4.7 out of 10,000 cases of premenopausal breast cancer.

Unnecessary antibiotics. According to the Mayo Clinic, scientists recently found a link between antibiotic use and breast cancer — the longer antibiotics were used, the greater the risk of breast cancer. Researchers caution, however, that other factors, such as underlying illness or a weakened immune system, rather than antibiotics themselves, may account for the elevated cancer risk.

Warning Signs of Breast Cancer

A change in the look or feel of the breast:

- A change in the size or shape of the breast.
- A lump or thickening in the breast, the area surrounding the breast or the underarm.
- A warm sensation in the breast.

A change in the look or feel of the nipple:

- A nipple turned inward or sunken into the breast.
- The shape of the nipple becomes irregular.
- A rash on the nipple or areola.
- Nipple tenderness, increased sensitivity or pain.

Nipple discharge:

- Blood or fluid other than breast milk secreted from the nipple.

A change in the look or feel of the skin on the breast, nipple or areola:

- Dimpling of the skin on the breast (similar in texture of an orange rind).
- The appearance of irritated, red, scaly or swollen skin on the breast, nipple or areola.

Breast pain:

- Although breast pain is usually associated with benign breast conditions rather than breast cancer, it can be a symptom of either condition.

Adapted from National Cancer Institute, American Cancer Society, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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