



Lady of America Newsletter - October 2009

Fitness: Exercise Can Ward off Cancer

Obesity, physical inactivity, and poor nutrition are major risk factors for cancer, second only to tobacco use. Evidence is growing that women who exercise at moderate intensity reduce their risk of breast cancer. In one study from the Women's Health Initiative (WHI), as little as 1.25 to 2.5 hours per week of brisk walking reduced a woman's risk by 18%. Walking 10 hours a week reduced the risk slightly more. The American Cancer Society (ACS) recommends women workout 45 to 60 minutes five or more days a week. Risk drops with increased hours and the intensity of exercise, and studies have found that women who do an average of three hours of strenuous exercise a week reduce their risk of breast cancer by 20%.



"Physical activity affects breast cancer in two distinct ways: directly, by influencing circulating hormones, and indirectly, by helping to control weight," said Collen Doyle, MS, RD, director of nutrition and physical activity for the ACS.

The ACS recommends moderate to vigorous workout routines for women. "Activities considered moderate are those that make you breathe as hard as you would during a brisk walk. This includes things like walking, biking, and even housework and gardening. Vigorous activities generally engage large muscle groups and cause a noticeable increase in heart rate, breathing depth and frequency, and sweating," said Doyle.

Overall, says the ACS, the protective effect of physical activity may be greatest among lean women, women who have carried children to term and pre-menopausal women. The underlying mechanism of this potential protection is not well understood, although it has been hypothesized that the benefit may be due to the effects of physical activity on hormones and energy balance.

Leading a healthy lifestyle does not eliminate your risk of serious health problems like cancer, but it can help lower the risk. Physical activity helps because exercise lowers estrogen levels, fights obesity, lowers insulin levels and boosts the function of immune system cells that attack tumors, according to the Susan G. Komen for the Cure Foundation.

Remember, making healthy lifestyle choices can have rewards beyond breast cancer prevention.

Taking Care of Your Girls at 20, 30, 40 and Beyond

Breast cancer touches millions of lives. Research shows that you can help protect your breast health by taking precautionary steps at every age of life. Doing this not only allows you to become familiar with your body, but can also help reduce your risk of the cancer as far as

In your 20s: Become familiar with your breasts. Breast cancer is rare in young women, but the more familiar you are with your body the more likely you are to recognize changes.

- When you turn 20, perform regular monthly breast self-examinations one week after your period ends
- Have clinical breast exams every three years
- Begin familiarizing yourself with your family history, and pay special attention to added risk factors for developing breast cancer, such as family members with the cancer or obesity
- Monitor your alcohol intake. Studies have shown that high levels of alcohol intake probably increase the risk of breast cancer. If you drink alcohol, drink in moderation -- less than one drink a day

In your 30s: Breast cancer rates for women in their 30s are still relatively low, but this is the time to get serious about monitoring your breasts for any changes. It's common to experience fibrocystic breast changes. These may be felt as lumps. If you find one, have your doctor check it out. Many doctors recommend getting a baseline mammogram at age 35.

- Schedule a baseline mammogram and continue regular monthly breast self-examinations Eat a well-balanced diet rich in fruits and vegetables
- If you haven't already, begin an exercise regimen. Physical activity may help lower your risk from breast cancer. Exercise reduces estrogen levels, fights obesity, lowers insulin levels and boosts the function of immune system cells that attack tumors. Exercising three to four hours per week at moderate or vigorous levels can reduce your risk of breast cancer by approximately 20 percent.

In your 40s: Women in their 40s need to be more vigilant than ever about their breast screening, as cancer rates start to increase at this time of life. The probability of a woman in her 40s developing the disease is 1 in 70.

- Schedule annual mammogram and clinical breast examination, and continue regular monthly breast self-examinations.
- Start decreasing alcohol consumption to no more than one per day
- Eat healthy. The affect of adult weight on the risk of breast cancer is different among pre- and post-menopausal women. Before menopause, it appears that being somewhat overweight decreases a woman's risk of getting breast cancer. After menopause, being overweight increases the risk of the disease.
- Exercise should be part of your lifestyle if it isn't at this age. Exercising three to four hours per week at moderate or vigorous levels can reduce your risk of breast cancer by approximately 20 percent

In your 50s: As menopause begins, breast cancer rates start to rise; one in 40 women will get the disease in this decade of her life. Taking care of your health becomes more important than ever.

- Schedule annual mammogram and clinical breast examination, and continue regular monthly breast self-examinations.
- Start decreasing alcohol consumption to no more than one per day
- Eat healthy. The affect of adult weight on the risk of breast cancer is different among pre- and post-menopausal women. Before menopause, it appears that being somewhat overweight decreases a woman's risk of getting breast cancer. After menopause, being overweight increases the risk of the disease.
- Maintain your bodyweight or lose weight if you are overweight
- Be sure to get enough vitamin D
- Exercise should be part of your lifestyle if it isn't at this age. . Exercising three to four hours per week at moderate or vigorous levels can reduce your risk of breast cancer by approximately 20 percent.

- Avoid or limit hormone replacement therapy (HRT)

In your 60s: The average age of a woman who receives a breast cancer diagnosis is 62, which is why you need to be more vigilant about your breast health.

- Schedule annual mammogram and clinical breast examination, and continue regular monthly breast self-examinations. Track any changes you notice in your monthly self-exam.
- Start decreasing alcohol consumption to no more than one per day
- Eat healthy. The affect of adult weight on the risk of breast cancer is different among pre- and post-menopausal women. Before menopause, it appears that being somewhat overweight decreases a woman's risk of getting breast cancer. After menopause, being overweight increases the risk of the disease.
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- Be sure to get enough vitamin D
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