

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Steven L. Smith, DC

Reduce Your Breast Cancer Risk

This year, an estimated 1.3 million women will receive the frightening diagnosis of breast cancer. Survival rates for the disease are improving, but treatments tax patients' bodies, and the deadliest cancer for women still claims thousands of lives annually.

The good news is that you can reduce your risk of developing breast cancer. As a doctor of chiropractic, Dr. Smith believes in the power of the human body to ward off disease and encourages patients to be proactive by focusing on prevention.

Much More Than Genetics

Most women know that a family history of breast cancer is a major risk factor for the disease — a pair of genetic mutations called BRCA1 and BRCA2 greatly increase the odds for breast cancer.

But genetics are not the only risk factor — eight out of nine women with breast cancer do *not* share the diagnosis with a first-degree relative (*Lancet* 2001;358:1389-99).

This tells us that other factors cause breast cells to grow abnormally. Dr. Smith explains to patients that if you can control these factors, you can significantly reduce your breast cancer risk.

Environmental Hazards

Several synthetic chemicals are known *carcinogens*, agents that cause cancer. The unique growth pattern of breast tissue makes it particularly susceptible to carcinogens. Unlike other organs, breasts are not fully formed at birth — they develop over several years. Research suggests that as breast tissue cells rapidly divide and mature, they are easily damaged by exposure to carcinogens.

So what common chemicals are carcinogenic and how can you avoid

them? Some of these carcinogens reach us via the air. *Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons* (PAHs) are in fossil fuels as well as in cigarette smoke.

One study found that premenopausal women with DNA damage from PAH exposure were 58 percent more likely to have breast cancer than those without damage from PAHs (*Cancer* 2007;109:2667-2712).

Minimize your exposure to vehicle exhaust and cigarette smoke to reduce the burden of PAHs on your body — smoking can double your risk for breast cancer.

Fumes from certain solvents used in dry cleaning, machine shops and beauty salons are also linked to higher breast cancer incidence in women who work in these environments (*Cancer* 2007;109:2667-2712).

Some rivers in industrial areas are contaminated with now-banned industrial chemicals called *polychlorinated biphenyls* (PCBs), and consuming fish from these waters is hazardous. Women with higher than average exposure to PCBs have up to a fourfold increase in breast cancer risks (*Cancer* 2007;109:2667-2712).

Another food risk comes from *bisphenol A* — or BPA — a plasticizer used

in food packages. In lab studies, rats exposed to BPA have abnormalities in the development of mammary glands (*Toxicol Pathol* 2010;38:110-2).

To abstain from BPA, avoid canned foods that are not labeled “BPA-free” as well as plastic food containers marked with the number 7 for recycling.

Toxic Personal Care Products

Cosmetics and personal care products are other potent sources of carcinogens. Many contain preservatives called *parabens*, which are thought to be endocrine interrupters — chemicals that mimic the body's hormones and cause disturbances in the endocrine system.

A well-known investigation found trace amounts of parabens in biopsied breast tumors, raising questions about the safety of these ingredients (*J Appl Toxicol* 2004;24:5-13).

Phthalates are common in personal care products as a component of synthetic fragrances. Recent studies implicate phthalates as endocrine interrupters and potential triggers of breast cancer (*Environ Health Perspect* 2010;118:539-44).



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The good news is that many companies are responding to consumer demand for products without potentially dangerous ingredients. You can easily find products without parabens, phthalates or aluminum in health food stores. They are also increasingly available in regular grocery and drug stores.

Finally, researchers have uncovered evidence that the aluminum in many antiperspirants might be linked to breast cancer. Investigating tissue removed in mastectomies, they found substantially higher concentrations of aluminum in the quadrant of the breast nearest to the underarm — the same quadrant that has statistically higher incidence of tumors (*J Inorg Biochem* 2007;101:1344-6).

Childbearing and Beyond

Many cases of breast cancer involve an abnormal reaction by breast tissue to the hormone estrogen. So, life events that affect a woman's hormone levels also affect her chance of developing breast cancer.

Giving birth decreases the risk of breast cancer, even more so when the first birth is earlier in life. For example, assuming no family history of the disease, a woman who has her first child at age 20 or younger nearly halves her risk compared to a woman who is 30 or older when she starts her family (*J Natl Cancer Inst* 1989;81:1879-86).

Multiple pregnancies further decrease a woman's odds of developing breast cancer. When researchers compiled data on nearly 150,000 women from 30 countries, they discovered that breast cancer sufferers had fewer average births than those who were cancer-free — in fact, every live birth decreased risk of breast cancer by seven percent (*Lancet* 2002;360:187-95).

The same study revealed the protective effect of breastfeeding on breast health. Women's risk of breast cancer dropped by 4.3 percent for every 12 months of breastfeeding.

Additional research shows that as little as three months of breastfeeding can drop the risk of breast cancer in

women with family history of the disease (*Arch Intern Med* 2009;169:1364-71).

The choices women make after their childbearing years can also affect their cancer risk. Combination hormone replacement therapy (HRT), once commonly prescribed to counter uncomfortable effects of menopause, has been proven to significantly boost risks of both breast and ovarian cancer (*Menopause* 2010;17:242-55).

Nutrition

An overall balanced diet and healthy weight keep the immune system strong and decrease cancer risk. A review of prospective studies shows that women who are overweight are consistently more likely to end up with breast cancer than those who maintain a healthy weight (*Cancer* 2007;109:2712-49).

You can further protect yourself by filling your diet with colorful fruits and vegetables rich in certain nutrients and phytochemicals. Concord grapes and berries get their deep colors from flavonoids called anthocyanins, powerful antioxidants that appear to work synergistically with these fruits' vitamin C to hinder growth of cancer cells (*Phytother Res* 2010;24:1862-9).

The chemical resveratrol in red grapes also shows preventive powers in animal tests (*J Carcinog* 2006;5:15).

When it comes to vegetables, tomatoes provide lycopene and retinoic acid that thwart the growth of breast and other cancers (*Eur J Nutr* 2006;45:275-82).

Cruciferous vegetables — such as broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage — contain indole-3-carbinol, a phytochemical that fights breast tumors by making them less susceptible to the influence of estrogen (*J Nutr Biochem* 2006;17:659-64).

Insufficient vitamin D levels — a harbinger of weakened immunity — are strongly associated with breast cancer. Fatty fish, beef liver and cod liver oil are good dietary sources of vitamin D. However, the best way to boost your body's reserves is to get moderate daily sun exposure.

Other nutritional deficiencies implicated in breast cancer include iodine and selenium. During the last 30 years iodine consumption dropped, while breast cancer rates shot up. Iodine appears to temper the sensitivity of cancer cells to estrogen, curtailing their growth (*Int J Med Sci* 2008;5:189-96).

And, a study of breast cancer patients revealed that 80 percent had deficient blood levels of selenium, a mineral that activates key antioxidants against cancer (*Br J Cancer* 2006;95:674-6).

Try sea vegetables like kelp for a rich source of iodine, and get a daily dose of selenium from shellfish or nuts.

Omega-3 fats such as those in fish oil curb the inflammatory process that allows cancer cells to propagate, while too many of the omega-6 fats found in processed vegetable oils may promote the growth of breast cancer cells (*Int J Cancer* 2008;123:1637-43).

Conjugated linoleic acid (CLA), a potent antioxidant fatty acid found in grass-fed meat and butterfat, is also protective against breast cancer (*Nutr Metab* 2010;7:5).

Finally, limit or avoid alcohol to reduce your risk. Just one drink a day doubled the risk of one type of breast cancer in a recent investigation (*J Natl Cancer Inst* 2010;102:1422-31).

We Care

Our chiropractic office is committed to helping patients focus on prevention. That's why we work diligently to keep current with the most cutting-edge research on natural disease prevention and share this information with patients. If you have any health concerns, please share them with us. We care and are here to help!

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