

Raising awareness: Breast cancer and the small-breasted woman

More and more young women are being diagnosed with breast cancer, which is becoming of great concern to those who work with cancer patients. Here are some of the factors that could make both young and old vulnerable to the disease.

1. Family history: Breast cancer is usually higher in those women whose close blood relatives have had the disease. If you have a mother, a sister or a daughter who has cancer, then you are at a much greater risk of having it although over 85 per cent of those with breast cancer do not have a family history of the disease. Anybody who has a family member who was diagnosed with breast cancer has to start screening early, said Watson. 2. Alcohol: A high consumption of alcohol is believed to be linked to breast cancer, because this beverage increases the levels of some hormones, such as oestrogen, testosterone and insulin in the body. Unusually high levels of oestrogen especially, increases the risk of breast cancer. "A new study has shown that women who consume alcohol at least three times daily increase their breast cancer risk to over 30 per cent," Watson pointed out. 3. Intake of certain drugs: The intake of some medications has been shown to increase one's chances of having breast cancer. According to the America Cancer Society, DES (diethylstilbestrol), a drug which was once prescribed for pregnant women to lower their chances of miscarriages, has been one such drug found to increase breast cancer risks. 4. Obesity: Extra fat around the mid- section has been found to increase one's risk of breast cancer. Studies have shown that women with a mutation in the gene BRCA1, which predisposes them to breast cancer, are found 65 per cent less likely to develop the disease if they lose weight between 18 and 30 years of age. 5. Smoking: Some studies suggest a link between cigarette smoking and breast cancer, but the findings are still controversial. Still, a report published in mid-2009 by a group of Canadian experts said that evidence from new studies have shown that there is a link. Even exposure to secondhand smoking was shown to increase one's risk to the disease. 6. Not breastfeeding: Breastfeeding has been shown to decrease one's risk of breast cancer, especially when it is done for over a one-year period. One of the suggested reasons for this is the fact that breastfeeding lowers the total number of periods a woman has, as is the case with pregnancy. 7. Lack of exercise: Along with a poor diet, the lack of physical activity has been shown to increase one's risk of breast cancer. Exercising at least four to five times a week has been shown to decrease hormonal levels and help lower breast cancer risks.