

Preventing breast cancer

All the emphasis continues to be placed on the early detection of breast cancer, while the disease continues to be the commonest cancer in women and the incidence of this deadly disease continues to rise at an alarming rate - over 60 per cent since 1950.

It is estimated that one in three women will develop some form of cancer during her lifetime. Medical research strongly indicates that a woman's risk of developing cancer is largely under her control and depends on her choices. If you make lifestyle choices that promote cancer, you are at great risk. If you make informed, healthy choices, you can avoid this killer disease. Many people, even some doctors, still do not recognise the huge connection between lifestyle and chronic diseases like cancer. Some still believe cancer is just a matter of chance, or determined by your genes. But science indicates otherwise. According to recent research, women who follow simple dietary and lifestyle guidelines may significantly reduce their risk of developing and dying from cancer. Dr James Cerhan at the Mayo Clinic did research on women over 55 years and found that their risk of cancer was based on how many healthy lifestyle habits they practised, as recommended by the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR). Women who followed one or none of the recommended guidelines had a 35 per cent higher risk of developing cancer than women who adhered to most of the recommendations. The recommendations developed by AACR included: Do some moderate exercise every day and vigorous exercise at least once per week. Maintain normal body weight or keep your weight within 10 pounds of your weight at age 18. Eat five or more servings of vegetables and fruit daily. Keep your red meat and unhealthy animal-fat consumption to a minimum. Limit your alcohol intake to no more than one drink per day and do not smoke cigarettes. The research also showed that older women might reduce their risk of dying from cancer by almost half by not smoking, controlling body weight, exercising and eating a healthy, balanced diet. Dr Joseph Mercola, a noted US wellness expert, suggests that this study understates what is really possible. If the women studied did everything right: avoided all unhealthy processed foods, followed a cellular nutrition programme, ate whole foods, avoided cancer-causing food additives like sodium nitrite, aspartame and MSG, avoided artificial harmful chemicals in their personal care products, and took similar precautions, the cancer rate would be very low. Cancer should actually be a rarity as it was centuries ago. Women give themselves cancers like breast cancer by knowingly or ignorantly making poor lifestyle choices. It is important to know the common risks factors for breast cancer and to do everything possible to avoid them.

Dietary and environmental risk factors A diet high in animal fat (modern beef, poultry, and dairy products) contaminated with cancer-causing and hormone-like chemicals. A diet low in fresh vegetables and fruit. Exposure to household chemicals, such as cleaners, aerosols, pesticides, or pollution from industrial chemical or road traffic. **Lifestyle risk factors** Alcohol and tobacco, especially with early and excessive use. Inactivity, obesity and a sedentary lifestyle. Dark hair dyes with early and prolonged use. Prolonged stress, when inadequately managed. Low levels of vitamin D from a lack of sunshine. **Medical risk factors** Oral contraceptives, especially with early and prolonged use. Estrogen-replacement therapy commonly used in menopausal women, especially with high doses and extended use.

Mammograms before menopause, with early and repeated exposure. The National Cancer Institute in the United States of America released evidence that among women under 35, regular mammography could cause 75 cases of breast cancer for every 15 cases it identifies. Silicone breasts implant that use polyurethane foam. Chronic use of some non-hormonal prescription drugs, such as some hypertension medicines, antibiotics, tranquilisers, anti-depressants, cholesterol-lowering drugs, and chemotherapy - the very drugs used to treat cancer itself. Patients on chemotherapy for cancer have an increased risk of developing another different cancer. It is important for every woman to make a serious commitment to avoid these factors that are known to increase their risk for developing breast cancer. In addition, the factors listed above relate not only to breast cancer, but also to other cancers like cancer of the uterus, fibrocystic disease of the breast, uterine fibroids, premenstrual syndrome and endometriosis among others. Some of these factors also put our men at risk for prostate cancer and low sperm counts. Knowledge is power only if you put it to work for you. Prevention is better than cure.