

Breast Cancer Drugs To Be Offered To 500,000

Half a million women with a family risk of breast cancer are to be offered drugs to prevent the disease, in a groundbreaking move by the NHS watchdog.

The drugs, which cost as little as £25 a year, can reduce the risk of the cancer by a third, potentially saving thousands of lives. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) says women with several close relatives who have developed breast cancer should be offered five years of preventative treatment with the drugs tamoxifen or raloxifene. It will make England and Wales the first countries in Europe to offer breast cancer drugs to healthy women. Professor Gareth Evans, a consultant in clinical genetics at St Mary's Hospital in Manchester who helped develop the new NHS guidelines, said: "This is a major breakthrough for women. "This treatment is not just cost-effective, but cost saving to the NHS. "More importantly for women, they don't have to go through the stress and trauma of a diagnosis, radiotherapy and potentially chemotherapy." He said that preventing "four or five" breast cancers will result in one life being saved. Around 50,000 women and 400 men develop breast cancer in the UK each year. Currently those with a family risk of the disease are offered either more intensive screening, or surgery to remove their breasts. Angelina Jolie recently opted for surgery because of her inherited risk. But the new guidelines offer women a middle way. Dr Caitlin Palframan of the charity Breakthrough Breast Cancer said the guidelines were a "game-changer". "We think more women will have more options to reduce their risk, which ultimately means we will prevent more breast cancer cases," she said. The guidelines also call for more women with relatives who have developed the disease to be tested for faulty BRCA genes. Charlotte Pittuck inherited the BRCA2 gene and several of her relatives have had breast cancer. She was given an 85% chance of developing cancer and will have her breasts removed next week. "While some would say it is a drastic measure, I feel it is my only option," she said. "I want to be around to see my children grow up. And if I had the diagnosis I would have had to have this operation anyway." Breast cancer prevention has been thrown into the spotlight after actress Angelina Jolie revealed she had a double mastectomy in May because she was at high risk of developing the disease. Testing had revealed she carried the genes that increase the likelihood of developing breast and ovarian cancers. Sky.com