

Breast Cancer And Jamaica

Despite all the hype, more Jamaican women will be diagnosed with breast cancer this year than last year.

Unfortunately, most of our efforts are directed at the early detection and then the treatment of breast cancer. By comparison, very little attention is aimed at prevention. After all, diagnosing and treating cancer is a huge and profitable business. I do not expect those powerful business interests to give much attention to preventing that which is so profitable to treat.

The health of your breasts is your concern. Yes, you should take steps to check for pre-existent breast disease. But, even more important, you must take the responsibility for your own cancer prevention programme. Prevention is infinitely better than cure. Think prevention. Breast cancer can be prevented and here is the plan I recommend:

EAT RIGHT A high-fibre low-fat diet. The major part of your diet should come from plant-based foods, such as fresh vegetables, fruits, whole grains, whole-grain cereals, beans, legumes, ground provisions, vegetable soups and fresh juices. Research shows that the fiber in these foods actually helps the body eliminate cancer-causing oestrogens from the body. A high-fibre diet is an anticancer diet.

Minimise meats and dairy products, as they are the major dietary sources of cancer-causing chemicals and dangerous oestrogen-like hormones. The fatty parts of beef, chicken and pork are particularly dangerous as the harmful chemicals are usually fat-soluble and are concentrated in the fatty tissues. Tinned, preserved or fried meats, e.g. bacon and sausage, contain the preservative sodium nitrite which is also cancer causing.

Eat soy-based foods They contain natural substances called isoflavones that protect the breast from cancer. These substances act like very weak hormones and protect the cells in the breast from the powerful chemical hormones.

Despite any unsubstantiated stories you may hear, there is no medical evidence that soy causes cancer. On the contrary, the research suggests that increased soy consumption decreases the risk of many cancers including breast and prostate cancer. A good soy-based protein shake taken daily is a convenient way to ensure regular soy supplementation. Fermented soy foods like tofu, miso, tempeh and textured vegetable protein are also good. Roasted soy nuts are an excellent anti-cancer snack.

Minimise sugar intake For many reasons, sugar promotes the growth of cancer cells. The more processed a food, the more additives, including sugar, are found to it. Focus on more natural foods with less preservatives and chemicals.

Take Supplements A good multivitamin and mineral supplement is essential. I recommend supplementing each meal on a daily basis with vitamins, minerals and herbs. Even the conservative American Medical Association now endorses daily supplementation. I also recommend the antioxidants, Vitamins A, C, E and selenium (the ACES), as well as the antioxidant herbs - schizandra and rosemary.

Melatonin, a hormone produced by the pineal gland in your brain, is important for optimal immune function. Artificial lighting reduces our natural production of melatonin and taking it as a supplement at bedtime has been shown to aid in the prevention and treatment of breast cancer.

Herbs like red clover and Kudzu, like soy, contain isoflavones. Tang Quei is a herb that promotes a healthy hormonal balance in women. These are conveniently available as tablet or teas. A holistic practitioner can advise you on their use.

Manage the Menopause Consider bio-identical hormone replacement therapy. They are alternatives to synthetic and horse-derived hormones. Hormone replacement can be both safe and effective if we first determine which hormone the body needs and then replace what is missing with the same substance. That is what I mean by bio-identical hormone replacement. Natural progesterone, for example, is available as a skin cream and is a useful tool in managing the menopause while protecting the breast from cancer.

Change Your Lifestyle Correct and avoid obesity. Obesity is a risk factor for breast cancer. Fat cells create additional oestrogen and this can promote breast cancer. Also, fat women discover their breast cancer later than slim women do. Weight (fat) loss along with moderate exercise will decrease your cancer risk along with providing several other health benefits.

Avoid toxins Stay away from tobacco smoke. It causes cancer. Avoid, or at least minimise, your alcohol intake. Drinking alcohol increases the levels of oestrogen in your blood.

Be extremely careful with hair dyes. One study reported that 87 out of 100 breast cancer patients had been long-term users of hair dye. Many semi-permanent and permanent hair dyes are a witch's brew of carcinogens. Use safer, natural

alternatives for skin and hair care.

Avoid environmental pollution and unnecessary drug use (prescription or otherwise). Be careful with household chemicals. Do a regular internal cleansing and detoxification programme.

Expose your skin to sunshine Half an hour in the morning or late-afternoon sun is ideal. The darker your skin the more sunshine you need. The sun uses cholesterol in your skin to create a powerful form of vitamin D in the right quantity for your needs. Optimal levels of vitamin D protects from many cancers, including breast and prostate cancer. Regular sunshine also improves the body's production of melatonin.

Learn to detect and manage stress This is very important. Chronic stress causes raised levels of the stress hormone cortisol. High cortisol levels may impair the body's immune system and weaken your resistance to cancer and other diseases.