

Making Strides In Your Community

Because Your Loved Ones Matter Most

While death rates from breast cancer have been declining steadily since 1990, the disease remains the most common cancer diagnosed in women and the second leading cause of cancer death in women. Thankfully, you have the power to help do something about it. Make a difference in the fight against breast cancer in your community by reminding the women you know to get a yearly mammogram and remembering to do the same.

Thanks to mammograms and new treatments, the five-year survival rate for breast cancer that has not spread to other parts of the body has increased from 80 percent in the 1950s to 98 percent today. Make sure you follow the American Cancer Society's guidelines for the early detection of breast cancer:

If you are 40 or older:

- Have a mammogram every year for as long as you are in good health.
- A breast exam by your doctor or nurse should be a part of your periodic health exam at least every year.
- Report any breast change to your doctor right away. Breast self-exam is an option for finding changes.

If you are 20 to 39:

- A breast exam by your doctor or nurse should be a part of your periodic health exam at least once every three years.
- Report any breast change to your doctor right away. Breast self-exam is an option for finding changes.

Tell Your Friends and Loved Ones about Breast Cancer

Be sure to tell your friends and loved ones the following five things about this disease:

1. All women can get breast cancer – even those who have no family history of the disease.
2. The two factors that make you most likely to be diagnosed with breast cancer are being a woman and growing older.
3. If you are a woman and are 40 or older, get a mammogram every year. Sign up for a free email mammogram reminder at www.cancer.org.
4. Mammograms are the best way to find breast cancer early, when it is small, has not spread, and is most treatable. Mammograms often find cancer before a woman or her doctor would be able to feel it.
5. You can help reduce your chances of developing breast cancer by engaging in regular physical activity, maintaining a healthy weight, and limiting alcohol intake. Also, if you notice any breast changes, tell your doctor right away.

For more information about breast cancer and how to find it early, contact the American Cancer Society anytime, day or night, at 1-800-ACS-2345 or visit www.cancer.org. You can also join the fight against breast cancer by participating in one of the American Cancer Society's Making Strides Against Breast Cancer® walks nationwide. This inspiring event unites communities to honor and celebrate breast cancer survivors, educate women about the importance of early detection and prevention, and raise money to fund lifesaving research and support programs to further our progress against this disease. Visit www.cancer.org/stridesonline to find out about events in your area.

Making Strides to Save Lives

Breast Cancer Cases Drop

Decline in Use of Hormone Therapy Possible Reason

The incidence of new breast cancer cases in the United States dropped a dramatic 7 percent between 2002 and 2003, according to doctors from the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center. That translates to about 14,000 fewer women who got the disease in 2003, they say.

The reason, they think, might be that a significant number of women stopped using hormone replacement therapy (HRT) in 2002 after a well-publicized study linked a certain type of HRT to a higher risk of breast cancer. That study, the Women's Health Initiative (WHI), found that HRT with estrogen and progesterin – commonly prescribed to help relieve symptoms like hot flashes in women going through menopause – can significantly increase breast cancer risk.

Soon after those results were announced, about half of the women using estrogen/progesterin HRT stopped, according to researcher Peter Ravdin, MD, in a statement released by M.D. Anderson. The new findings were presented in December at the San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium.

But Ravdin and other researchers say it's too soon to know for sure if that reduction in HRT use was the reason so many fewer cases of breast cancer were diagnosed the following year.

"Something went right in 2003, and it seems it was the decrease in the use of hormone therapy, but from the data we used we can only indirectly infer that is the case," Ravdin said in the statement.

American Cancer Society Deputy Chief Medical Officer Len Lichtenfeld, MD, says the decline in hormone use may have slowed the growth of cancers that were already in development. But there could be other explanations for the lower breast cancer rate, too.

"We were already seeing a slight decrease in the number of cancers year to year before the WHI study," he explains. "This could be due to lifestyle changes or some other unknown factor, but when you consider that this country doesn't appear to be getting healthier, that raises the concern that there may have been some other explanation for that decrease. Examples could be fewer mammograms in general, and in particular for the increasing number of uninsured or underinsured women, or perhaps because of decreased access to mammogram facilities."

Despite recent declines, breast cancer remains the most common cancer diagnosed in women and the second leading cause of cancer death in women. The latest statistics from the American Cancer Society predict 178,480 new cases and 40,460 deaths in 2007. Only lung cancer claims more lives: 70,880 lung cancer deaths are expected among women in 2007.

Death rates from breast cancer have been declining steadily since 1990, the statistics show. But that doesn't mean women should stop getting screened for the disease – whether they took hormones or not. "We recommend that a woman at average risk age 40 and over have a mammogram and clinical breast examination annually," Lichtenfeld says. "If you are a post-menopausal woman who either stopped taking hormones or never took hormones, please do not delude yourself into thinking you don't need a mammogram."

As for taking hormone therapy, the recommendation remains: If you need it, take the lowest dose possible for the shortest time possible.

Making Strides In Your Life

Lifestyle vs. Breast Cancer Steps You Can Take to Lower Your Risk

Q: For women who want to lower their risk of breast cancer, is there any benefit to watching what you eat, controlling your body weight, and getting regular physical activity?

Feigelson: Absolutely. We know that being overweight can increase the risk of breast cancer after menopause. And that risk increases with weight gain. Women who gain more than 70 pounds as adults double their risk. Physical activity has been associated with a 10 to 25 percent reduction in risk. Maintaining a healthy weight, being physically active, and reducing alcohol intake are the best ways for women to reduce their risk of breast cancer.

Of course, all women age 40 and older need to be getting yearly mammograms and breast exams to uncover any sign of breast cancer as early as possible, when treatments are most successful.

Q: Are there specific foods, eating plans, or calorie levels that you recommend for women who want to lower their risk of breast cancer? What about a low-fat diet?

Doyle: There are no specific foods a woman should eat to reduce breast cancer risk. For women who are concerned about their risk of breast cancer, the best eating plan (and calorie level) is one that helps them

achieve a healthy weight.

Q: What about alcohol consumption? How much is too much?

Doyle: Regular consumption of more than one alcoholic drink per day is associated with an increased risk of breast cancer, particularly in women who do not consume enough of the vitamin folate. Therefore, for women who do drink, reducing alcohol may be an important way to reduce breast cancer risk. I would encourage all women, but especially those who drink, to consume folate-rich foods: leafy greens, legumes, and enriched whole-grain products.

Q: Most Americans are overweight. At what point does being overweight start to increase a woman's risk for breast cancer? Should women be concerned if they gain 15 to 25 pounds of "middle-aged spread" as they age?

Feigelson: Breast cancer risk begins to increase when adult weight gain (defined as weight gain since age 18) is more than 20 pounds. A recent American Cancer Society study found that women who gained 21 to 30 pounds since age 18 were 40 percent more likely to develop breast cancer than women who had not gained more than five pounds, and women who gained more than 70 pounds doubled their risk.

Further, excess weight greatly increases the risk for metastatic tumors, which are more difficult to treat than tumors that have not spread. Women who gained more than 60 pounds since age 18 were three times more likely to have metastatic breast cancer than women who gained less than 20 pounds as an adult.

Q: Will losing weight reduce a woman's risk of breast cancer?

Doyle: Recent studies do show that losing weight can help lower the risk of post-menopausal breast cancer. The key message for women is it's really never too late to start living healthier.

Q: What about physical activity? How much is needed to lower breast cancer risk? What kinds of activities count?

Doyle: Physical activity affects breast cancer in two distinct ways: directly, by influencing circulating hormones, and indirectly, by helping to control weight. The American Cancer Society recommends that women be moderately to vigorously active for 45 to 60 minutes on five or more days per week to lower breast cancer risk.

Activities considered moderate are those that make you breathe as hard as you would during a brisk walk. This includes things like walking, biking, and even housework and gardening. Vigorous activities generally engage large muscle groups and cause a noticeable increase in heart rate, breathing depth and frequency, and sweating.

Q: Can you describe a typical daily or weekly exercise schedule for a woman who wants to lower her risk for breast cancer?

Doyle: Each woman can determine how to fit 45 to 60 minutes of activity into her day, five days a week, by finding the things that she really enjoys doing and will keep doing. A few pointers that may help women design their own plan are:

- Strive to make it a priority. Schedule physical activity into your day/week just like other appointments you have.
- Exercise with others. Many women find it easier to stay motivated and committed if they are exercising with other people. If you are that type, find someone who shares your desire to be more active.
- If childcare is an issue, try to find someone in your neighborhood who could switch off with you – you watch her kids while she works out, and she watches yours when you work out.