

Breast Cancer: Prevention vs. Early Detection

Breast cancer is the leading cause of death in women between the ages of thirty and fifty, and is second only to heart disease as a leading cause of death in women over fifty. Approximately 205,000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer in the United States every year, of these approximately 54,000 are fatal. This figure does not include those that survive beyond the five-year survival rate only to find that the cancer has metastasized (relocated or invaded) to another area or organ in the body. The American Cancer Society reports that one in four women will be diagnosed with breast cancer. Who is considered to be at risk for developing this deadly disease? The leading breast cancer researchers seem to be grabbing at every reason under the sun. These reasons include gender, age, race, family history, genetics, never having children or having the first child after the age of thirty, never breast feeding, estrogen imbalances, estrogen replacement therapy, obesity, environmental pollution, high saturated fat diet, etc. With research like this it looks as though if you are a woman you are at a huge risk for developing breast cancer. Men are not dismissed from this disease in fact about 1,100 men develop breast cancer each year in the United States.

Breast cancer is defined as the uncontrolled or abnormal growth of cells within breast tissue. This uncontrolled cell growth can eventually overwhelm the body's natural defenses. I, as well as many other holistic based Nutritionists and Naturopathic Physicians, believe that cancer occurs when the body becomes overwhelmed with toxicity. One of the body's natural functions is the ability to detoxify itself, however the body can become over burdened when an abundance of toxins bombard us on a routine basis. Most of the harmful substances we swallow, absorb, inhale or create are expelled from the body. The organs that make the detoxification process possible are the liver, kidneys, intestinal tract, lungs and skin. A healthy circulatory and lymphatic system also supports the detoxification process. These organs and systems can become sluggish as a result of toxin overload, when this happens the body has a more difficult time expelling waste matter. The toxic waste that is left behind is typically stored within the cells, tissue, organs and lymphatic system and can often damage or mutate cells.

October is nationally recognized as Breast Cancer Awareness month. It is during this time that walk-a-thons, races and other benefits begin to pop up all around us. These benefits are held to raise money for research in the hopes that one day a "cure" for breast cancer will be discovered. Each year the National Cancer Institute receives 1.8 billion dollars in federal money for cancer research. Only 5% of this money is spent on research for prevention of cancer and only 5% of that is spent specifically on breast cancer prevention. Before donating any of your time and/or money to the battle against breast cancer investigate where your money will be spent. Through the use of famous entertainers, media and news publications the medical community spreads their propaganda for the importance of early detection. American women are urged to begin receiving yearly mammograms at the age of forty, or younger if there is a family history of breast cancer. Throughout this campaign against such a horrible disease I have yet to hear anyone in the medical profession speak the words of prevention not including the misuse of prescription medications as a preventative measure. Even the best monthly natural health publications speak the words of early detection without much to offer on preventative measures. With such a strong push for early detection one would assume that all women are destined to develop breast cancer at some point in life. The words early detection gives us the false impression that if caught "in time" survival is guaranteed. Unfortunately this is rarely the case. How often have you heard cancer patients use the term "remission" or "cancer free"? These are statements that we hear quite frequently but what does it mean? The definition for remission according to Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary is "the lessening of severity or abatement of symptoms, or the period during which symptoms abate (reduce)". Webster's definition of remission is "a temporary or permanent decrease or subsidence of manifestations of a disease". These definitions alone show us that if a medical professional states that someone is in remission it simply means that the patient is currently without symptoms. At any time the disease could re-manifest itself and the symptoms will reappear. By no

means does remission mean cured or cancer free. When these words are spoken from doctor to patient there is a false sense of security that develops. The ultimate key to winning this battle is prevention not merely early detection. I can not stress this enough.

Physicians are not taught prevention, they are taught to diagnose and intervene with drugs and/or surgery. Research is done in the same manner. Scientists are looking for intervention methods instead of prevention methods. Medical research is funded by the federal government and the pharmaceutical industry, is it any wonder that the only preventative medical research that is done on diseases today involves the use of genetic testing and harmful drugs. Through medical research it has been stated that women who inherit specific genes are at a greater risk for developing breast cancer. Women who have a strong family history are urged to be genetically tested for the breast cancer gene. If detected the next course of action is to surgically remove both breasts and use drug therapies before the cancer has a chance to develop. This is an unbelievably drastic measure and I would hardly call it preventative health. I read a document released by the National Cancer Institute; the subject was on the use of the drug Tamoxifen (AKA Nolvadex). Tamoxifen is a drug that interferes with the activity of estrogen. Tamoxifen has been prescribed for more than twenty years to treat patients with advanced breast cancer; it is also used as an additional therapy following surgery, radiation or chemotherapy. The studies on Tamoxifen claim that it inhibits the primary breast cancer from returning and also prevents new cancers from developing in the opposite breast. Based on these findings the National Cancer Institute funded a large research study to determine the usefulness of Tamoxifen in preventing breast cancer. At this time there is absolutely no evidence that Tamoxifen is beneficial for women who do not have an increased risk of breast cancer. The study is on going and to this date the studies have shown that women taking Tamoxifen have more than twice the chance of developing uterine cancer compared to women who are taking a placebo. In fact, many breast cancer patients developed uterine cancer while taking Tamoxifen and died as a result of the uterine cancer. Women taking this drug also appear to be at risk for developing cataracts, corneal scarring or retinal changes. Side effects of Tamoxifen include hot flashes, vaginal dryness, vaginal discharge, bleeding and irritation of the skin around the vagina, irregular menstruation, dizziness, headaches, fatigue, weight gain, nausea and/or vomiting and loss of appetite. The usual prescribed treatment is to take Tamoxifen continuously for at least five years. High doses of Tamoxifen have proven carcinogenic effects in studies done on rats. In fact, pharmacists are instructed not to handle the drug without wearing latex gloves due to its high potency and damaging effects.

We have two forms of early detection according to the medical community, self or physician breast examinations and mammography. The medical profession seems to have forgotten that most cancer cells grow at a very slow rate and can sometimes take up to ten years or more for a tumor to be large enough to be felt upon self examination or detectable on a mammogram. It has been found that mammograms have at best a 75% accuracy rate. One reason for this is the variation in breast tissue density. The breast tissue in younger women is much more dense than the tissue of women in their fifty's and above. Another reason is human error which can take place during the actual test or after with the misreading of the mammogram itself. Only nine states have strict educational requirements for the technicians who are performing mammograms. This leaves forty-one states with no laws protecting or assuring the patient that the person who is about to radiate a very tender area of tissue has any qualifications or proper training to do so. The medical experts state that the amount of radiation exposure during mammography is equal to the amount received from taking one dental x-ray giving the impression that this is a safe amount when in reality there is no "safe" level of radiation exposure. There are several studies showing that reducing the number of x-rays especially at a young age decreases the risk of breast cancer. In fact the American College of Physicians, United States Preventive Services Task Force, American Academy of Family Practice and the Canadian Task Force on the Periodic Health Exam collectively do not recommend the use of routine mammograms in women under the age of fifty.

An alternative to using mammography as an early detection device is available, yet most physicians do not utilize it. This alternative is known as Regulation Thermography. Its first medical use

dates back to 1974 when it was the focus in a large-scale, breast cancer detection research project by the National Institute of Health (NIH). During that time diagnostic criteria were undeveloped and the NIH eventually dropped the program and began focusing on mammography. Since that time over 12,000 journal articles have been written and data has been gathered from over 30,000 thermograms. The thermography device does not emit rays to penetrate body's tissue, therefore there is no radiation exposure during the procedure. Thermography focuses directly on the body's organs and tissues where it can detect future disease tendencies or developing ailments. Research has shown that Regulation Thermography may detect breast cancer 5 to 7 years prior to being detected by mammography. If you do choose to receive a mammogram it is wise to increase your intake of specific antioxidants and drink at least 64 ounces of distilled water per day two to three weeks before and after the exam in order to neutralize any free radical activity created in the body.

So what can be done to help prevent breast cancer? If you are a smoker, it is time to quit, also avoid second hand smoke, eliminate alcohol consumption and avoid exposure to toxic chemicals. Begin in your own home by using environmentally friendly cleaning solutions, detergents and use a filtered shower head. The amount of harmful chemicals in our water supply is astounding. The most important step that should be taken to prevent any disease is to implement a health supportive diet. This new "diet" should be thought of as a change in lifestyle, it is not a temporary fix. Diet in itself plays the largest role in preventing disease. Avoid hydrogenated and partially hydrogenated oils, saturated fats, dairy products especially those that are not organic, refined sugar, white flour products, overly processed foods, caffeine, carbonated beverages, artificial colors and flavors, smoked foods, artificial sweeteners such as Aspartame, Nutrasweet and Splenda, preservatives such as BHT, BHA and EDTA, sulfites, nitrates, nitrites and any other chemical food additive. These ingredients are found everywhere in mainstream processed, packaged foods. The question I hear most often is, "What can I eat? This eliminates everything in my typical diet." This is true but with over three million Americans battling some form of cancer would any sensible individual really want to consume the same diet as the average American? My advice is to consume foods that are still in the state in which nature intended them to be. Eat close to the earth. A healthy disease preventing, energy enhancing, cancer-fighting diet should always include at least 75% fresh, raw, organically grown, vine-ripened fruits and vegetables. Through natural occurrence vine-ripened fruits and vegetables develop cancer-fighting phytochemicals. These phytochemicals help in both the prevention and treatment of cancer. Cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli, cabbage, kale, cauliflower and brussels sprouts, as well as, garlic and onion provide powerful anticancer properties. Citrus fruits are known for their high levels of vitamin C and bioflavonoids, both are extremely important for optimal immune system function and contain anticancer properties. Tomatoes contain a cancer fighting carotenoid known as lycopene. The essential fatty acids found in cold water fish and flax seeds help to prevent breast cancer and significantly increase natural killer cell activity. Lignans found in plant foods such as flax seeds lock onto estrogen receptor sites preventing xenoestrogens (harmful estrogens from the environment) from binding. This action stops cellular DNA damage that leads to over 90% of all breast cancer cases. Fermented soy foods such as tofu, tempeh and miso contain many compounds that slow cancer development. Also consume plenty of sea vegetables, which contain a highly absorbable source of plant minerals, and whole grains, nuts, seeds and beans for their high fiber content. Consume a minimum of 1 ounce of distilled or reverse osmosis water per 1/2 lb body weight on a daily basis. For example a 180lb male should consume 90oz per day. There are many nutritional supplements that can be beneficial in the prevention and treatment of breast cancer. To use these therapies safely and effectively consult a knowledgeable natural health specialist that can work with you on an individual basis.

The reason I feel strongly about this subject is due to my personal connection with breast cancer. My mother was diagnosed with breast cancer when I was fifteen. She was only forty-five years old and a mother of five children. I watched helplessly as my mother endured surgery, radiation treatments, and multiple rounds of chemotherapy. Approximately one and a half years later the doctors told us that she was in "remission" and was placed on Tamoxifen as a preventative measure, which she remained on for

a total of nine years. Seven years after being diagnosed with breast cancer she was diagnosed with bone cancer. I was now twenty-two years old and again had to watch helplessly as my mother battled for her life. She was injected with massive amounts of chemotherapy until her veins collapsed. She suffered for two and a half years living out her last days in severe pain and drugged to the point of hallucinations. No one should have to endure this kind of medical torture. I urge you to take the time to educate yourself on preventative health. Gaining the knowledge is the most important first step in the method of prevention.

Recommended reading: *Waking The Warrior Goddess* by Christine Horner, MD, FACS

Breast Cancer: Prevention vs. Early Detection

Written by Alisha O'Brian, MSN.

Alisha holds a Masters degree in Holistic Nutrition and is currently working towards a PhD in Holistic Nutrition. Alisha is co-owner of Harvest Moon Natural Market, as well as, a practicing Holistic Nutritional Consultant.