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Breast Cancer Breakthrough - Cut Your Risk of Death in Half

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By Dr. Mercola

According to the National Breast Cancer Foundation, 200,000 new cases of breast cancer will be diagnosed each year in the US, making it three times more common than other gynecological cancers.

Breast cancer will claim the lives of 40,000 people this year.

What is really disturbing is the speed at which breast cancer rates have risen over the past 5 decades. In 1960, one in twenty women were diagnosed—but today, it is one in seven.

The following are some important facts about this type of cancer:

- One woman in eight who lives to age 85 will develop breast cancer.
- Breast cancer is the leading cause of death for women age 40 to 55.
- Fifteen percent of all breast cancers occur in women under age 45; in this age group, breast cancers are more aggressive and have lower recovery rates.
- Eighty percent of breast lumps are NON-cancerous.
- Seventy percent of breast cancers are found through breast self-exams.
- About 80 percent of women diagnosed with breast cancer have no family history of breast cancer.

Unfortunately, the current medical paradigm is relatively clueless about what causes breast cancer and how to effectively treat it. Most conventional cancer treatments actually add insult to injury by doing more harm than good—a fact that up to this point has been swept under the rug by the medical industry.

Fortunately, we're beginning to see the initial stirrings of change, as you will see from the latest research I'll be presenting later.

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In the largest review of research into lifestyle and breast cancer, the American Institute of Cancer Research estimated that about 40 percent of U.S. breast cancer cases could be prevented if people make wiser lifestyle choices. I believe these estimates are seriously LOW, and it is more likely that 75 to 90 percent of breast cancers could be avoided by strictly applying the recommendations I will review below.

In fact, the latest paleoanthropological research shows that cancer was virtually nonexistent in humans before poor diet and pollution appeared, finally proving that cancer is a man-made disease.

My aim for this article is to provide you with a broad understanding of the factors that lead to the development of this deadly disease—as we now understand them—and what you can do preventatively to avoid becoming the next victim..If you happen to be a man, please read on since it actually does apply to you as well.

Men are NOT Immune to Breast Cancer

Breast cancer is not a disease exclusive to women. For every 100 women with breast cancer, one man will develop the disease. The National Breast Cancer Foundation estimates approximately 1,700 men will develop breast cancer and 450 will die from it each year.

The average age men are diagnosed with breast cancer is 67, versus 62 for women, meaning male cancers are often caught in a more advanced stage. If you work around petrochemicals, your risk is much higher. Men who work around gasoline and combustion products have a significantly higher risk of developing breast cancer.

Males and their doctors may be diverted from an accurate diagnosis due to enlargement of the breasts or gynecomastia, a common and benign condition, plus the fact that men are generally less vigilant about checking for breast lumps.

Types of Breast Cancer

Breast cancer is classified into two types, based on whether or not it is invasive:

- **Noninvasive (in situ) breast cancer**: Cancer cells have not spread to adjacent areas of your breast—they have remained in their place of origin. The most common type is ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS), which occurs in the lining of the milk ducts. Noninvasive breast cancer is sometimes called "stage 0" cancer.

- **Invasive breast cancer**. Cancer cells infiltrate or spread outside the membrane that lines a duct or lobule, into surrounding tissues. The cancer cells can then travel to other parts of your body. Invasive breast cancer can be stage I, II, III, or IV, depending on how advanced it is.

Breast cancer can be further classified according to what type of tissue it arises from:

- **Milk ducts**: Ductal carcinoma is the most common type of breast cancer.

- **Milk-producing lobules**: Lobular carcinoma originates in the lobules, where breast milk is produced.

- **Connective tissues (muscles, fat and blood vessels)**: Rarely, breast cancer can originate from these breast tissues; in this case, it's called sarcoma

Inflammatory Breast Cancer: The Rarest and Most Aggressive Form

Inflammatory breast cancer (IBC) is a rare form of breast cancer of sudden onset (weeks to months) and can easily be confused with a breast infection (mastitis). The affected breast is red, swollen, warm and tender because cancer cells have blocked the lymphatic vessels in your breast.

You might or might not have a lump.

IBC accounts for between 1 and 5 percent of all breast cancer cases in the U.S., and is more common among younger women and African American women. There have been some cases documented in men. IBC is the

most aggressive form of breast cancer, and survival rates are worse than for other types of breast cancer.

You should seek medical attention immediately if you have the above symptoms—or if you are being treated for mastitis but your symptoms are not resolving as expected.

Signs and Symptoms to Watch For

The most common signs and symptoms of breast cancer include the following:

- A breast lump or thickening that feels different from the surrounding tissue
- Bloody discharge, or other unusual discharge, from your nipple
- A change in your breast's size or shape
- Changes in the skin on your breast, such as dimpling or indentation
- Redness or pitting of your breast skin—kind of like the skin of an orange
- Pain or tenderness in your breast
- An inverted nipple
- Peeling or flaking of the nipple
- Enlarged lymph nodes or swelling in your armpit

If you have any of these changes, you should consult your healthcare provider immediately. But don't panic—remember, the majority of breast tumors are benign. Many of the above signs can indicate other issues besides cancer, and your healthcare provider can help you sort it out.

What Causes Breast Cancer?

We now know that breast inflammation is KEY to the development and progression of breast cancer. Inflammation is not the cause, but rather is a key process that sets the stage for breast cancer to occur. There are certainly many aggravating factors, from foods to chemicals in the environment to lifestyle patterns and genetics—but it is the INFLAMMATION that these things cause that starts the wheel turning.

Scientists have shown that an inflammatory process within the breast itself promotes growth of breast cancer stem cells. That's the bad news.

The good news?

Researchers were able to inactivate this inflammation selectively, which reduced the activity of these stem cells and stopped breast cancer from forming. Although your genes are a factor in your breast cancer risk, it is not your genes that dictate your health but rather the *expression of them*, and that depends on what genes you "turn on and off" with your lifestyle and emotional state (epigenetic factors).

In other words, you have more power over your health than your genetics does!

Breast Cancer is Closely Tied to Estrogen Exposure

There are a number of studies that have given us clues about the factors contributing to breast cancer. But one of the most significant factors is synthetic hormone replacement therapy (HRT). According to a study published online in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute, breast cancer rates for women dropped in tandem with decreased use of HRT. In Canada, between 2002 and 2004, HRT use dropped by 7.8 percent. During that same time, breast cancer rates also fell by 9.6 percent.

This further supports existing evidence that HRT is linked with breast cancer, which is an estrogen-related cancer. So it is no surprise that giving women potent synthetic estrogens will increase their risk.

However, there's a twist.

After remaining stable at around five percent between 2004 and 2006, breast cancer rates then began to rise again, even though HRT use remained low. The researchers claim this is an indication that HRT simply *speeds up tumor growth*, as opposed to directly causing it.

It's also important to remember that you are exposed to a large number of estrogen-like compounds daily, called xenoestrogens. Estrogen pollution is increasingly present all around you, from plastics to canned food and drinks, food additives, household cleaning products, and pesticides. And estrogen levels are rising in our waterways as a result of the runoff from factory animal farms.

Still, whether it's a promoter or a causative factor, there's good reason to be wary of using HRT to address natural menopause. There is no reason to subject yourself to synthetic hormones when you reach menopause—the risk is simply too great.

If you are experiencing excessive menopausal symptoms, you may want to consider bioidentical hormone replacement therapy, which uses hormones that are molecularly identical to the ones your body produces and does not wreak havoc on your system, which is a much safer alternative.

There are similar risks for younger women who use oral contraceptives—birth control pills, which are also comprised of synthetic hormones—have been linked to cervical and breast cancers. Another aggravating factor in breast cancer is, unfortunately, the breast cancer screening tool itself.

Are Mammograms Fueling Breast Cancer Rates?

Mammography is a great example of a stubborn head-in-the-sand approach to cancer screening. Americans are already exposed to seven times more radiation from diagnostic scans than they were in 1980. It is well known that ionizing radiation increases the cellular mutations that lead to cancer—and mammograms aim a highly focused dose directly at your breasts, thereby increasing your cancer risk!

WHY would you want to do this?

Mammograms expose your body to radiation that can be 1,000 times greater than a chest x-ray, which we know poses a cancer risk. Mammography also compresses your breasts tightly, and often painfully, which could lead to a lethal spread of cancerous cells, should they exist. Dr. Charles B. Simone, a former clinical associate in immunology and pharmacology at the National Cancer Institute, said:

"Mammograms increase the risk for developing breast cancer and raise the risk of spreading or metastasizing an existing growth."

Others have spoken out against mammography. Dr. Samuel Epstein, a top cancer expert who has been warning people for years about the dangers of mammography, explains:

> *"The premenopausal breast is highly sensitive to radiation, each 1 rad exposure increasing breast cancer risk by about 1 percent, with a cumulative 10 percent increased risk for each breast over a decade's screening..."*
>
> *"The high sensitivity of the breast, especially in young women, to radiation-induced cancer was known by 1970. Nevertheless, the establishment then screened some 300,000 women with X-ray dosages so high as to increase breast cancer risk by up to 20 percent in women aged 40 to 50 who were mammogramed annually."*

In July 1995, an article in *The Lancet* about mammograms read:

> *"The benefit is marginal, the harm caused is substantial, and the costs incurred are enormous."*

There is no solid evidence that mammograms save lives, in spite of the propaganda some organizations constantly parrot to the press. Mammograms are often touted as a "life-saving" form of cancer screening,

responsible for reducing breast cancer death rates by 15 to 25 percent. But this reported benefit is based on outdated studies done *decades* ago.

In September 2010, the *New England Journal of Medicine*, one of the most prestigious medical journals, published the first *recent* study in years to look at the effectiveness of mammograms, and their findings are a far cry from what most public health officials and physicians would have you believe.

Their bottom line was that mammograms might have only reduced cancer death rates by 0.4 deaths per 1,000 women—an amount so small it may as well be zero. Put another way, 2,500 women would have to be screened over 10 years for a single breast cancer death to be avoided.

So, not only are mammograms unsafe, but they are NOT saving lives as many professionals believed they were.

Past research has also demonstrated that adding an annual mammogram to a careful physical examination of the breasts does not improve breast cancer survival rates over a physical examination alone.

False Positives are Alarmingly Common in Mammography

Another glaring problem with mammography is its unacceptably high rate of false positives. If a mammogram detects an abnormal spot in a woman's breast, the next step is typically a biopsy. This involves taking a small amount of tissue from the breast, which is then looked at by a pathologist under a microscope to determine if cancer is present. Estimates are that 17 percent of DCIS cases found through needle biopsy are misdiagnosed.

Mammograms carry a first-time false positive rate of up to 6 percent.

The problem is that early stage cancer like DCIS can be very hard to diagnose, and pathologists have a wide range of experience and expertise. There are no diagnostic standards for DCIS, and there are no requirements that the pathologists doing the readings have specialized expertise.

Dr. Shahla Masood, the head of pathology at the University of Florida College of Medicine in Jacksonville, told the *New York Times*:

> *"There are studies that show that diagnosing these borderline breast lesions occasionally comes down to the flip of a coin."*

Unnecessary Mastectomies are More Common than You Might Think

False positives can lead to unnecessary emotional stress and expensive repeat screenings, exposing you to even more radiation, chemotherapy, and unnecessary invasive procedures including biopsies and major surgery. Women have actually undergone unnecessary mastectomies after receiving a false positive mammogram report.

After receiving a breast cancer diagnosis, most women are afraid and even frantic to do whatever it takes, as soon as possible, to fight and remove the cancer. And usually, that involves the "slash and burn" approach. Can you imagine what it would be like to go through surgery, having one or both of your breasts removed along with receiving debilitating radiation treatments and toxic drugs, only to later be told that you ***never had cancer***?

This scenario happens more often than you might think; you can read about several women's terrifying ordeals with false breast cancer diagnoses here.

And there is new evidence that breast cancer might go away on its own a fair amount of the time. Yes—WITHOUT intervention. A group of researchers who track breast cancer rates found evidence to suggest that some tumors found by mammograms might naturally disappear on their own.

Mammograms will not *prevent you* from getting breast cancer, and the latest study shows they offer very little benefit in improving your chances of survival. Effective cancer screening methods are important, but mammography is simply NOT the answer.

But then, what is the answer?

The screening tool I recommend is breast thermography.

What About Breast Self-Exams?

Breast self-exams have long been recommended as a simple way for women to keep track of anything unusual in their breasts. Now, after studies have found that such exams do not reduce breast cancer death rates and actually increase the rate of unnecessary biopsies, many experts are recommending a more relaxed approach known as "breast awareness."

Breast awareness is really self-explanatory. It means you should regularly check your breasts for changes, but can do so in a way that feels natural to you. In other words, you don't have to do it on the same day each month, or using any particular pattern.

Simply be aware of what's normal for you so you can recognize anything out of the ordinary. Although breast cancer is much less common in men, it certainly wouldn't hurt for men to practice "breast awareness" as well.

One of the BEST Supplements for Breast Cancer

Dr. William LaValley from Austin Texas, is one of the top natural medicine cancer physicians I know and he recently shared this important information on curcumin which has the most evidence based literature for as a cancer support than any other nutrient. There are over 100 different pathways that curcumin has an effect on once it gets into the cell. Interestingly this also includes the metabolite of curcumin and its derivatives which are also anti-cancer. Curcumin appears to be safe in the treatment of all cancers.

In India where turmeric is widely used, the prevalence of four common U.S. cancers -- colon, breast, prostate and lung -- is 10 times lower. In fact, prostate cancer, which is the most frequently diagnosed cancer in U.S. men, is rare in India and this is attributed, in part, to the curcumin in turmeric.

Numerous studies have looked into this potential cancer-fighting link, with promising results. For instance, curcumin has been found to:

- Inhibit the proliferation of tumor cells
- Inhibit the transformation of cells from normal to tumor
- Help your body destroy mutated cancer cells so they cannot spread throughout your body
- Decrease inflammation
- Enhance liver function
- Inhibit the synthesis of a protein thought to be instrumental in tumor formation
- Prevent the development of additional blood supply necessary for cancer cell growth

And according to researchers from the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, curcumin blocks a key biological pathway needed for development of melanoma and other cancers.

The spice actually stops laboratory strains of melanoma from proliferating and pushes the cancer cells to commit suicide by shutting down nuclear factor-kappa B (NF-kB), a powerful protein known to induce abnormal inflammatory response that leads to an assortment of disorders such as arthritis and cancer.

To get the full benefits that curcumin has to offer, you will want to look for a turmeric extract with at least 95% curcuminoids that contains only 100% certified organic ingredients.

The formula should be free of fillers, additives and excipients (a substance added to the supplement as a processing or stability aid), and the manufacturer should use safe production practices at all stages: planting, cultivation, selective harvesting, and then producing and packaging the final product.

Details on How to Use Curcumin

The unfortunate challenge as this time is that there are not really any very good formulations of curcumin available to use in cancer. This is because relatively high doses are required and curcumin is not absorbed that well. Typical anticancer doses are up to three grams of good bioavailable curcmin extract, three to four times daily.

One work around for this is to use the curcumin powder and make a microemulsion of it by combining a tablespoon of the powder and mixing it into 1-2 egg yolks and a teaspoon or two of melted coconut oil. Then using a high speed hand blender to emulsify the powder.

Another strategy you can use to increase absorption is to put one tablespoon of the curcumin powder into a quart of boiling water. It must be boiling when you add the powder as it will not work as well if you put it in room temperature water and heat the water and curcumin. After boiling it for ten minutes you will have created a 12% solution and you can drink this once it has cooled down. The curcumin will gradually fall out of solution over time and in about six hours it will be a 6% solution so it is best to drink the water within four hours. It does have a woody taste.

One caution to know is that you want to avoid the "yellow kitchen" syndrome. Curcumin is a very potent yellow pigment and can permanently discolor surfaces if you aren't careful. So you can perform the mixing under the hood of your stove with the blower on to make sure no powder gets into your kitchen.

Keeping Abreast of the Research

I mentioned earlier that we are beginning to see the stirrings of change. Let me clarify what I meant by that. New scientific research on old methodologies is challenging some of the long-held notions about conventional cancer treatments, and some of this research is making it into mainstream medical journals.

Cancer screening is finally getting some long-awaited scrutiny, as it should be. And that process has found some of the conventional breast cancer treatment methods to be significantly flawed and in need of revision. It's about time!

Here are some of the more significant recent findings related to conventional breast cancer treatment:

1. **Needle biopsies**

   Needle biopsies are widely used as part of the traditional allopathic approach to diagnosing breast cancer. But they may accidentally cause malignant cells to break away from a tumor, allowing it to spread to other areas of your body.

   According to a study from the John Wayne Cancer Institute, it appears that a needle biopsy may increase the spread of cancer by 50 percent compared to patients who receive excisional biopsies, also known as lumpectomies.

2. **Lumpectomies**

   A 2010 study found, for certain women, a lumpectomy might not be necessary. The procedure was found to not prolong survival or prevent recurrence of breast cancer.

3. **Lymph Node Removal**

   Lymph node removal might not be necessary after all. Today, the standard treatment for breast cancer patients whose cancer has spread to the sentinel lymph node is to surgically remove the other nodes as well—a procedure called axillary node dissection. (The "sentinel node" refers to the node closest to the tumor, or the lymph node that can be reached by metastasizing cancer cells first.)

   However, according to this latest study, lymph node removal has virtually no impact on survival or disease recurrence, while it causes additional pain and debilitation. After five years, 82.2 percent of the women who had the axillary nodes removed were still alive and in remission, compared to 83.8 percent of the women who did not get the operation.

And, interestingly enough, the cancer *recurrence* was actually slightly *higher* in the group who had the operation, compared to those who didn't.

4. **Chemotherapy and Radiation**

   In addition to the removal of lymph nodes, current conventional treatment also typically includes chemotherapy and radiation therapy.
   Chemo is a standard recommendation for women whose cancer has spread to their lymph nodes, despite its magnificent failure rate and oftentimes lethal side effects. One study concluded that as many as 18,000 of the 45,000 women each year who undergo chemo for breast cancer could safely skip it.

   Similarly, six or more weeks of radiation are also part of the standard treatment for most women with breast cancer. However, according to another recent study, just ONE dose of radiation, delivered with precision to the affected site directly after her lumpectomy, had the *same rate of effectiveness* as the extended radiation treatment.

Breast Cancer Prevention Musts

A healthful diet, regular physical exercise, appropriate sun exposure or oral supplements to optimize your vitamin D levels, and an effective means of managing your emotional health are the cornerstones of just about any cancer prevention program, including breast cancer.

Regular physical activity has been shown to decrease the likelihood of developing breast cancer, as well as decreasing your chances of dying from it by 50 percent, once diagnosed.

It is also important to watch out for excessive iron levels. Elevated iron is actually quite common once women stop menstruating. The extra iron works as a powerful oxidant, increasing free radicals in your body and thereby increasing your risk of cancer.

The best way to monitor your iron is to have your ferritin level drawn. Ferritin is the iron transport protein and should not be above 80. If yours is elevated, you can reduce it simply by donating your blood.

The following lifestyle strategies will help you to further lower your breast cancer risk:

- **Optimize your vitamin D**. Vitamin D influences virtually every cell in your body and is one of nature's most potent cancer fighters. This is one of the most important steps you can take to protect yourself from cancer.

  Vitamin D is actually able to enter cancer cells and trigger apoptosis (cell death). When JoEllen Welsh, a researcher with the State University of New York at Albany, injected a potent form of vitamin D into human breast cancer cells, half of them shriveled up and died within days! The vitamin D worked as well at killing cancer cells as the toxic breast cancer drug Tamoxifen, without any of the detrimental side effects and at a tiny fraction of the cost.

  If you have cancer, your vitamin D level should be between 70 and 100 ng/ml. Vitamin D works synergistically with every cancer treatment I'm aware of, with no adverse effects.

  I invite you to watch my one-hour free lecture on vitamin D to find out what your optimal vitamin D levels should be and how to optimize them.

- **Get plenty of natural vitamin A**. There is evidence that vitamin A also plays a roll in preventing breast cancer. It's best to obtain it from vitamin A rich foods, rather than a supplement. Your best sources are organic egg yolks, raw butter, raw whole milk, and beef or chicken liver.

  However, beware of supplementing as there's some evidence that vitamin A can negate the benefits of vitamin D. Since appropriate vitamin D levels are crucial for your health in general, not to mention cancer prevention, this means that it's essential to have *the proper ratio* of vitamin D to vitamin A in your body.

  Ideally, you'll want to provide all the vitamin A and vitamin D substrate your body needs in such a way that your body can regulate both systems naturally. This is best done by eating colorful vegetables (for vitamin A) and by exposing your skin to sun every day (for vitamin D).

- **Avoid charring your meats**. Charcoal or flame broiled meat is linked with increased breast cancer risk. Acrylamide—a carcinogen created when starchy foods are baked, roasted or fried—has been found to increase breast cancer risk as well.

- **Avoid unfermented soy products**. Unfermented soy is high in plant estrogens, or phytoestrogens, also known as isoflavones. In some studies, soy appears to work in concert with human estrogen to increase breast cell proliferation, which increases the chances for mutations and cancerous cells.

- **Improve Your Insulin Receptor Sensitivity.** The best way to do this is with exercise and a diet comprised of foods appropriate for your nutritional type.

- **Maintain a healthy body weight.** This will come naturally when you begin eating right for your nutritional type and exercising. It's important to lose excess body fat because fat produces estrogen.

- **Drink a quart of organic green vegetable juice daily.** Please review my juicing instructions for more detailed information

- **Get plenty of high quality animal-based omega-3 fats, such as krill oil.** Omega-3 deficiency is a common underlying factor for cancer.

- **Curcumin.** This is the active ingredient in turmeric and in high concentrations can be very useful in the treatment of breast cancer. Concern must be addressed with the solubility though as it is not well absorbed. However it does show great therapeutic potential in preventing breast cancer metastasis.

- **Avoid drinking alcohol**, or at least limit your alcoholic drinks to one per day.

- **Breastfeed exclusively** for up to six months. Research shows this will reduce your breast cancer risk.

- **Avoid wearing underwire bras.** There is a good deal of data that metal underwire bras increase your breast cancer risk.

- **Avoid electromagnetic fields as much as possible.** Even electric blankets can increase your cancer risk.

Other Research-Based "Dos and Don'ts"

The following is a list of various factors that have been scientifically found to impact breast cancer in one way or another. Many are isolated studies that offer food for thought and open up potential avenues for future research. For more information on each, simply click on the links provided.

- Depression can influence breast cancer survival. Women whose depression lifts in the first year after being told they have advanced breast cancer outlive by more than two years those whose depression symptoms worsened.

- SSRIs (a category of antidepressant drug) are associated with increased breast cancer risk.

- CoQ10 http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/pdq/cam/coenzymeQ10/Patient appears to be another useful tool. Ubiquinol would be the preferred form as it works better than the oxidized CoQ10.

- Black cohosh shows promise in fighting breast cancer by inducing apoptosis in human breast cancer cells.

- Artemisinin (a compound in wormwood) has been shown to be toxic to human breast cancer cells.

- A high carbohydrate diet may increase your breast cancer risk.

- Foods that have a scientific basis for fighting breast cancer include kelp, spicy foods, cruciferous vegetables (especially broccoli), and evening primrose oil.

- Three cups of tea daily may slash your breast cancer risk by 50 percent.

- If you eat a poor diet, it can cause DNA changes that may increase your daughters' and granddaughters' risk of breast cancer.
- Antiperspirants can increase your breast cancer risk due to their toxic metals, such as aluminum, which influence estrogen activity.
- Too much light at night was found to increase breast cancer by inhibiting melatonin in a study by the American National Cancer Institute.
- Women who have had an abortion are up to twice as likely to develop breast cancer, according to a British study.

If You're Diagnosed With Early Stage Breast Cancer

In the event that you are diagnosed with DCIS or another form of early stage breast cancer, always get a second—and possibly third and fourth—opinion. I cannot stress this enough, since the false positive rates are just too high and the diagnostic criteria too subjective.

Before you make any decision on treatment—and definitely before you decide to have surgery or chemotherapy—make sure your biopsy results have been reviewed by a breast specialist who is knowledgeable and experienced in that field.

The majority of breast cancer is preventable. But if you are hit with that diagnosis, don't lose hope! There is a great deal you can do to harness your body's own powerful healing abilities.

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