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How to Cut Your Breast Cancer Risk Naturally

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By Dr. Mercola

According to estimates by the American Cancer Society, about 232,300 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in 2013, and about 39,600 will die from the disease.

Dr. Christine Horner is quite familiar with breast cancer. She began her career as a board certified general and plastic surgeon, performing breast reconstructive surgeries on women who'd had full mastectomies due to breast cancer.

While Dr. Horner was still in college, her mother developed breast cancer. Despite having a mastectomy, and successfully addressing a second breast tumor that appeared 13 years after the first one, she later died from cancer that metastasized in her femur.

"That's the thing that really rocked my world," Dr. Horner says. "In the interim, I had started my plastic surgery practice.

Because my mom had had breast cancer, I thought, well, I'd get active with the American Cancer Society. I was the spokesperson for the American Cancer Society on breast cancer issues.

I was trained to say, 'We don't know what causes it. We don't have any known cures. The best things that women can do are mammograms and breast exams in the hope of catching it early to save lives.'

[Then] it was like, 'Well, that didn't work for my mom.' And then, I noticed at my practice that my patients started getting younger and younger and younger. Finally, I was doing women in their 20s. I just thought, something is way wrong with this picture."

Story at-a-glance

Thousands of studies show that simple lifestyle strategies can be tremendously protective against cancer. This includes food, supplements, herbs, exercise and sun exposure

Many lifestyle strategies tested have the ability to cut your risk of cancer by about 50 percent; sometimes more. Optimizing your vitamin D levels, for example, has been shown to cut breast cancer incidence by 77 percent in four years

Protective strategies that are effective against breast cancer also work on these other types of cancer. Cancer prevention strategies will also virtually eliminate most other chronic disorders

Thermography can be an empowering screening tool, as it can detect the potential for cancer. By identifying areas of high inflammation, you can address the underlying cause of the inflammation before cancer has a chance to develop

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Thousands of Studies Show Why We're Not Winning the War on Cancer...

Dr. Horner began reviewing the medical literature in search of clues that might reveal an answer to the dramatic increase in breast cancer, now appearing in women at an increasingly younger age.

What she discovered was thousands of studies that show exactly why we have a cancer epidemic—factors that contribute to it, and factors that are highly protective.

"And they were all natural," she says. "It's food, supplements, herbs, diet, and lifestyle. ...I'm board certified in general surgery and plastic surgery... there's 11 years of training in there.

I didn't have a single course in nutrition. I learned nothing about health – nothing. All I learned was how to suppress symptoms with pharmaceutical medications or cut it out.

*It wasn't until I discovered that there was such an association with diet, herbs, lifestyle, and emotions too, that I thought, okay, **these** are the real secrets to health."*

As a result of her research, she got trained in Ayurveda, a traditional system of medicine from India. "Ayur" means life and "veda" means knowledge, so it literally means "the knowledge of life"; wisdom that, if followed, can bring you into balance and enhance your body's innate self-healing intelligence.

The truth is, there are many simple strategies that can drastically reduce your chances of developing cancer, or any other chronic disease for that matter; strategies that do not involve harmful side effects.

"I decided to quit my practice and dedicate myself to teaching people about what they can do – the simple things that they can do – that can have a dramatic impact on their life," she says.

"With all my research in the area of breast cancer, I thought the first thing I'm going to do is write a book on all the natural approaches to protecting against and fighting breast cancer because, definitely, we have the information to end the breast cancer epidemic. No question about it."

It's worth mentioning that the same strategies apply for other types of cancer as well. Prostate and colon cancer tumors, for example, are similar to breast cancer tumors, as certain hormones cause them all to grow. Hence, protective strategies that are effective against breast cancer also work on these other types of cancer. Cancer prevention strategies will also virtually eliminate most other chronic disorders.

Her dedication, research, and ultimate findings led to her writing the book, *Waking the Warrior Goddess: Dr. Christine Horner's Program to Protect Against and Fight Breast Cancer*, which contains research-proven all-natural approaches for protecting against and treating breast cancer.

Conventional Cancer Screening Is NOT a Preventive Strategy

When it comes to breast cancer, it's important to understand that getting regular mammogram screenings is NOT going to prevent anything. In fact, mammography, which employs radiation, can increase your risk since ionizing radiation itself causes cancer... As Dr. Horner writes in her book:

"A European study published in 2012 found that when those who have the genetic predisposition for breast cancer (BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene mutation) are exposed to any diagnostic radiation before age thirty, their risk of breast cancer increases by 90 percent.

The study also found that a history of mammography before age thirty raised the risk by 43 percent. In fact, even one mammogram before the age of thirty for those with the BRCA1 gene mutation was associated with an increased risk.

A newer type of mammogram touted to be much better at detecting breast cancers, called tomosynthesis, takes a 3-D image of the breast. You definitely want to avoid this type of mammogram because it uses

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three times more radiation than the standard type!"

Furthermore, mammograms:

- Are incorrect 80 percent of the time (providing a false negative or false positive)
- Use compression, which can damage breast tissue or potentially spread cancer
- Are not effective for up to 50 percent of women (women with dense breasts or implants)
- Can lead to over-diagnosis and over-treatment of non-invasive cancers
- Can lead to the disturbing practice of "preventative" double mastectomies

MRIs, which do not use ionizing radiation, are not a practical tool as they are very expensive, and, like mammograms, they're not very specific. Ultrasound is another technique used in Western medicine. The traditional ultrasound can see whether a mass is cystic or solid.

But while a solid mass is generally considered to be something that might be of concern, this is not 100 percent certain either, as cancer tumors can sometimes have cysts in them.

In her book, Dr. Horner also mentions another type of ultrasound called "elastography," which shows the elasticity of tissues.

Cancerous tissue is typically stiffer than healthy tissue, so this ultrasound can identify cancer based on the firmness of the tissues. Several studies published since 2007 have concluded that elastography ultrasound is a useful tool for detecting cancers without using harmful radiation. It also helps reduce the number of unnecessary biopsies from false-positive mammography readings.

Most Natural Prevention Strategies Cut Your Risk in Half

What's most important, however, is Dr. Horner's discovery that most of the lifestyle strategies that have been scientifically tested have the ability to cut your risk of cancer by about **50 percent**; sometimes more. And yet virtually no one in conventional medicine talks about and shares such findings with their patients. *Why?* For example, turmeric can slash your risk by about half, while optimizing your vitamin D levels has been shown to cut breast cancer incidence by 77 percent¹ in four years!

Of course, other lifestyle factors are also important in preventing cancer, such as nutrition, exercise, sleep, and managing stress. However, vitamin D's critical importance seems to grow with every emerging study. Carole Baggerly, founder director of GrassrootsHealth—an organization dedicated to increasing awareness about vitamin D and the crucial role it plays in health—believes that as much as 90 percent of ordinary breast cancer is related to vitamin D deficiency, which is 100 percent preventable!

Despite its name, vitamin D is actually a powerful neuro-regulatory steroid with epigenetic influence over more than **2,000 genes** in your body. That's about 10 percent of all your genes. There are more than 830 peer-reviewed scientific studies showing vitamin D's effectiveness in the treatment of cancer, and personally, I believe it is virtually malpractice to not optimize vitamin D levels when treating someone with cancer. In this case, your vitamin D levels should be around 70-100 ng/ml. For more information about optimizing your vitamin D levels, please see my previous article Test Values and Treatment for Vitamin D Deficiency.

Now, if making just ONE beneficial change can halve your risk, or more... imagine what can happen if you address several lifestyle factors known to have an effect.

*"It becomes incredibly simple to dramatically lower your risk of developing this disease," Dr. Horner says.
"And then it takes the fear away. We don't have to be so afraid of this horrible disease... we do have tremendous power in dramatically lowering our risk."*

Most importantly, Dr. Horner discovered that there are a number of healthy habits we've **stopped** doing in our modern culture that are highly protective against cancer. We've dramatically altered our diets—shunning our native, whole-foods cuisine for highly processed fare—and engage in very little physical activity, for example. We've also been told to fear the sun and slather our children in toxic sunscreens instead of reaping the

tremendously protective benefits of vitamin D production that appropriate sun exposure brings. Fortunately, these factors are entirely within your personal control.

When It Comes to Breast Screening Options, You Do Have a Choice

Dr. Horner is a strong proponent of using thermography to track physiological changes that could indicate the beginning stages of cancer formation. Contrary to mammography, thermography does not provide you with an anatomic image. Rather, it measures the infrared heat emitted by your body and translates this information into thermal images.

Thermography does not require mechanical compression or ionizing radiation, and can detect signs of physiological changes due to inflammation and/or increased tumor related blood flow approximately 8-10 years before mammography or a physical exam can detect a mass.

"To me, it's an incredibly useful tool," Dr. Horner says. In her book, she writes: "Research shows that, unlike mammograms, when thermography suspects something is wrong, it usually is. A study published in the American Journal of Radiology in January 2003 concluded that this technology could help prevent most unnecessary breast biopsies: 'Infrared imaging (thermography) offers a safe noninvasive procedure that would be valuable as an adjunct to mammography in determining whether a lesion is benign or malignant.'"

Dr. Mercola Interviews Dr. Christine Horner



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Thermography Can Empower You to Take Control of Your Health

Since it can give you close to a decade's worth of "lead time," it can be very empowering tool. Should the image indicate an area of inflammation, you can immediately start applying strategies to reverse such symptoms, and within a couple of months be able to confirm that it's working by taking another picture. Since it's as harmless as taking a photograph of yourself, you need not worry about making more frequent follow-ups.

"One of the most exciting and important uses for thermography, I believe, is being able to use it on young women," Dr. Horner says. "The earlier we can get them, the earlier we can get them involved in their own health..."

Mammograms don't usually work on women 40 and under because their breast tissue is too dense. Plus, the other really scary thing about it is that when our breast tissue is younger, it's more sensitive to radiation. If you're getting mammograms when you're younger, it's far more damaging. We know that

radiation is a contributor to the cause of breast cancer. It's like why do you do a test that uses something that actually causes that disease? Hello? Early on, it's worthless."

Again, the reason why thermography is so effective as a preventive tool is because it can detect the *potential* for cancer, and can detect already formed cancers at a *far* earlier stage than a mammogram. Essentially, it detects areas of high inflammation, which can be viewed as a "hot-spot" with cancerous *potential*.

But it's important to understand that thermography does not *diagnose* cancer. Again, higher temperature readings indicate higher levels of inflammation, which can lead to cancer. But if your thermogram shows areas of high inflammation, it *doesn't* mean you *have* cancer. Rather it lets you know you need to address that inflammation to avoid deterioration, and in some cases that the area needs further evaluation.

What Does the Science Say About Unfermented Soy and Breast Cancer?

I've typically recommended avoiding unfermented soy due to their being high in plant estrogens, or phytoestrogens, also known as isoflavones. Dr. Horner, however, disagrees with the notion that soy can work in concert with human estrogen to increase breast cell proliferation, thereby increasing your risk of mutations and cancerous cells.

"After all this research, I am very aware of the plant estrogen controversies," she says. "These are the following facts that I can tell you. Most of the concern over 'plant estrogens' come from one study that isolated and concentrated one chemical from soy, genistein, and gave it to women for one year as a supplement. At the end of the year, the breast cells in these women showed signs of stimulation. This study certainly raises the concern that taking isolated, concentrated genistein supplements does not protect the breast tissue and in fact may increase the risk of cancer."

Therefore, taking this type of supplement is not advisable. But many people leaped to the conclusion that all soy foods or anything with phytoestrogens in it must have the same effects in our bodies and should be avoided. But, thousands of studies show eating foods high in 'plant estrogens,' like whole soy foods, lower the risk of breast cancer. Whole soy foods have many different 'phytoestrogens' in them as well as hundreds of other constituents and are clearly processed in your body differently from the isolated chemical genistein."

Flax seeds, for example, also contain phytoestrogens and, according to Dr. Horner, there are hundreds of studies showing that flax not only protects against breast cancer more effectively than any other food we know of, but may also shrink breast tumors. She also cites research by Lilian Thompson at the University of Toronto, who has done many studies on flaxseeds and estrogen-positive tumors. In one of Dr. Thompson's studies, she found that estrogen-positive breast tumors shrank in every woman given flax seeds for three weeks.

"I had personal experience with this," Dr. Horner says. "My business manager's mother developed breast cancer. I started her on three tablespoons of flax seed per day, plus a potent herbal antioxidant. Her tumor was 1.5 cm on mammogram. At the time of surgery three weeks later her tumor had shrunk to 0.5 cm.

With all these cancer fighting effects, not surprisingly, research shows that women who have the highest level of lignans in their body have the lowest risk of breast cancer. Flax seeds contain 100 times more lignans than any other known plant source and are one of the most power foods you can eat to lower your risk of breast cancer.

Here's the key to understanding this controversy: Plant estrogens are not the same as the estrogens your body makes, or synthetic estrogens found in hormone replacement therapy. They are very different. Many actually act more like selective estrogen modulators or SERMS (Tamoxifen is a SERM) and as aromatase inhibitors like Arimidex. These plant chemicals act in so many complex ways that we may never fully understand them all."

Dr. Thompson's and other research shows that flax lignans fight breast cancer: in a number of ways by:

Lowering your overall production of estrogen

Blocking environmental estrogens from attaching to breast tissue

Creating more of a "good" protective type of estrogen	Protecting your breast tissue from the damaging effects of environmental toxins
Decreasing three different growth factors associated with the growth of breast cancer	Blocking the aromatase enzyme in a way similar to the drug Arimidex
Lengthening your menstrual cycle	Blocking the estrogen receptor in a way similar to the drug Tamoxifen

Dr. Horner has a chapter dedicated to the latest research on soy in her book, which will give you far more details on this complex topic. But according to Dr. Horner, the bottom line is that:

1. You should avoid taking a genistein supplement
2. Plant estrogens, although referred to as estrogens, actually are very different from estrogen
3. Thousands of studies show eating foods high in 'plant estrogens' has a significant protective effect against many diseases including breast cancer
4. Effectively protecting yourself from breast cancer or improving your chances of successfully fighting it does not come from "one" thing -- it comes from the sum total of all of your diet and lifestyle choices.

Are You Ready to Switch to a Health-Based Paradigm?

It's unfortunate that today's "health care" system is so financially wrapped up in maintaining the illusion that there's not much you can do about your health. Diseases are seen as something that sooner or later will "happen" to you, and when you become ill, the remedy is usually a toxic pill or invasive and costly procedure. It doesn't have to be this way. As Dr. Horner says:

"My message to women, particularly when we talk about breast cancer, is that you have an extraordinary power in lowering your risk of this disease, which is all too prevalent in our culture, and that there are so many simple things that you can do. So you do one thing – again, one thing – and you can cut your risk in half. If you do more than one thing, those things will multiply up together. It becomes incredibly simple to dramatically lower your risk. The side benefit is that you feel better and better and better. It's simple. It's not complex."

To learn more, I highly recommend picking up Dr. Horner's book, [Waking the Warrior Goddess](#), winner of the Independent Publisher Book Award (IPPY) "Best book of 2006 for health / nutrition / medicine." You can also find more information on her website, DrChristineHorner.com.² Last but not least, below you'll find 10 of my own strategies that I believe will go a long way toward warding off breast cancer.

10 Simple Lifestyle Strategies to Reduce Your Risk of Breast Cancer

- **Radically reduce your intake of sugar/fructose and processed foods.** Normalizing your insulin and leptin levels by avoiding sugar and fructose is one of the most powerful physical actions you can take to lower your risk of cancer. Unfortunately, very few oncologists appreciate or apply this knowledge today. Refined fructose is especially dangerous, as research shows it actually speeds up cancer growth.
- **Optimize your vitamin D level.** Ideally it should be over 50 ng/ml, but levels from 70-100 ng/ml will radically reduce your cancer risk. Safe sun exposure is the most effective way to increase your vitamin D levels, followed by using a tanning bed that has an electronic ballast instead of a magnetic one. Either of these methods is far better than taking a high-dose supplement, which would necessitate increasing your intake of vitamin K2 as well, either from food or a supplement.
- **Make intermittent fasting part of your lifestyle.** Intermittent fasting will help your body shift to burning fat instead of sugar as its primary fuel. There are only two types of fuel; your body can burn carbs/sugar or fat. Nearly everyone who has cancer is burning carbs as their primary fuel. Since cancer cells thrive on

sugar this is something you want to avoid.

Intermittent fasting involves *timing your meals* to allow for regular periods of fasting. To be effective, the length of your fast must be at least 16 hours. This means eating only between the hours of 11am until 7pm, as an example. Essentially, this equates to simply skipping breakfast, and making lunch your first meal of the day instead.

- **Maintain a healthy body weight.** It's important to lose excess weight because estrogen is produced in fat tissue. Fortunately, this will come naturally when you begin eating right and exercising. Intermittent fasting is also extremely effective for weight loss and weight management. As for exercise, I strongly recommend incorporating high-intensity burst-type activities, which are part of my Peak Fitness program.
- **Get plenty of high-quality animal-based omega-3 fats,** such as those from krill oil. Omega-3 deficiency is a common underlying factor for cancer.
- **Drink a pint to a quart of organic green vegetable juice daily.** Please review my juicing instructions for more detailed information.
- **Avoid drinking alcohol,** or limit your drinks to one a day for women.
- **Watch out for excessive iron levels.** This is actually very common once women stop menstruating. The extra iron actually works as a powerful oxidant, increasing free radicals and raising your risk of cancer. So if you are a post-menopausal woman or have breast cancer you will certainly want to have your Ferritin level drawn. Ferritin is the iron transport protein and should not be above 80. If it is elevated you can simply donate your blood to reduce it.
- **Get proper sleep,** both in terms of enough sleep, and sleeping between certain hours. According to Ayurvedic medicine, the ideal hours for sleep are between 10 pm and 6 am. Modern research has confirmed the value of this recommendation as certain hormonal fluctuations occur throughout the day and night, and if you engage in the appropriate activities during those times, you're 'riding the wave' so to speak, and are able to get the optimal levels. Working against your biology by staying awake when you should ideally be sleeping or vice versa, interferes with these hormonal fluctuations. If you have children, breastfeed exclusively for up to six months. Research shows this will reduce your breast cancer risk.
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