



October is **Breast Cancer Awareness month**, and what's better than awareness? **Prevention!**



**Did you know?** Breast cancer is the most common cancer among Canadian women. In 2009, an estimated 22,700 women in Canada will be diagnosed with breast cancer. On average, that is 437 women diagnosed every week! As well, an estimated 180 Canadian men will be diagnosed with breast cancer this year.

#### How do our bodies fight cancer?

We all have body systems, cells and pathways set up to help prevent and defeat cancer. Diet, lifestyle, the external environment, and genetic makeup all influence our body's ability to fight cancer. Altering these influences where possible and supporting the body's anticancer systems are critical components of any cancer prevention and treatment plan.

#### Causes of Cancer Deaths:

- 35% due to diet, physical inactivity, and obesity
- 30% due to smoking
- 25% due to exposure to environmental and occupational pollutants
- 5-10% due to genetic factors (depending on the type of cancer)

As you can see, there are many modifiable risk factors for developing cancer. Many people believe that cancer is a genetic disease; however, while there are some genetic links, there are many other causes of cancer that are within your control to change.

#### Environmental Factors

Many environmental factors make a person more vulnerable to cancer:

- Hormones found in the food supply, Hormone Replacement Therapy and Birth Control Pills, environmental estrogen-mimicking compounds
- Agricultural use of pesticides and herbicides
- Genetically modified crops (long-term risks for human DNA unknown)
- Smoking and secondhand smoke
- Toxic chemicals released into the air, soil and water (ex. dioxins, PCBs, DDT, benzene, asbestos, lead, radon)
- Occupational exposure to toxins
- Ionizing and nonionizing radiation

#### Obesity

A high percentage of cancers are directly related to obesity. For women, being overweight (BMI  $\geq 25$ ) more than doubles the risk of dying of breast cancer. The more overweight a woman is, the greater her risk.

#### Household Chemicals

There are many chemicals commonly found in the home that have been linked to increased cancer risk:

- Plastics containing Bisphenol A (BPA)
- Polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs) which are fire retardants used to treat upholstered chairs, sofas, foam mattresses and cushions.
- Chlorinated hydrocarbons, chloroform, and trihalomethanes in cleaning products
- Pesticides and herbicides (eat organic as much as possible!)
- Paraphenylenediamine, phthalates, talc, and propylene glycol, found in hair products, cosmetics, deodorants, powders, skin creams, makeup and nail polish

#### Lifestyle Factors

A therapeutic lifestyle is an essential part of cancer prevention. What is a therapeutic lifestyle? Making choices every day that will enhance health and help prevent disease. If any of the following lifestyle-related risk factors apply to you, make efforts to change. If change is difficult, consult with a Naturopathic doctor who can support you and help you make changes at a pace you're comfortable with.

**Lack of Exercise:** Inactivity increases cancer risk since exercise is vital to prevent excess weight gain.

#### Smoking and Second-hand Smoke:

Cigarettes are packed with cancer causing chemicals.

#### Weekly Health Tips

Check us out in the NOW Magazine! Dr. Guthrie has been asked to provide a weekly health tip in the Health Classifieds section.



**Alcohol:**

Many research studies confirm that the more alcohol consumed, the higher the risk of developing cancer, especially cancers of the mouth, larynx, esophagus, liver, colon and breast. In fact, alcohol consumption increases the risk of breast cancer by approximately 10% for each increase in drink per day.

**Mood:**

Studies have demonstrated that stress and anxiety reduce immune activity and reduce your body's ability to fight cancer. As well, depression worsens risk factors such as inactivity, poor eating, and increased alcohol intake.

**Top 10 Ways to Prevent Cancer and Enhance Health**

- Eat at least 5 servings of vegetables & fruits daily
- Exercise at least 30 minutes five times per week
- Obtain adequate good-quality sleep
- Practice some form of stress reduction
- Eat organic as much as possible
- Drink more water and green tea
- Avoid or reduce your intake of alcohol, sodium and unhealthy fats (saturated and trans fats)
- Reduce your exposure to environmental and household carcinogens
- Love yourself and those around you
- Express yourself: communicate clearly, openly and honestly

*From: Definitive Guide to Cancer 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Alschuler & Gazella, 2007.*

**Early Detection**

If breast cancer is found at an early stage there is a better chance of successful treatment. Breast screening is the regular examination of a woman's breasts using a clinical breast exam and mammogram.

Although not a screening method, something you can do on your own is to be breast aware. Being breast aware means knowing how your breasts normally look and feel. That way, if there are any significant changes, you'll be more likely to notice them and can have them checked by a doctor.

**Naturopathic Breast Cancer Prevention Rx:**

**The following natural medicines have been shown in studies to help protect against breast cancer development. Try incorporating them into your daily life.**

- **Ground Flaxseeds (2 tbsp daily)**
- **Soy foods**
- **Vitamin D – most Canadians benefit from a Vitamin D supplement**
- **Fish oil**
- **Green Tea**

**Do you know someone who has already been diagnosed with breast cancer?**

A cancer diagnosis is a very scary experience. Thankfully, our treatments for cancer are improving and survival rates for breast cancer are on the rise. Most people with breast cancer will undergo surgery, chemotherapy, radiation and may also have hormonal therapy to prevent recurrence.

While there aren't any natural medicines that can take the place of these conventional treatments, breast cancer patients certainly can benefit from combining naturopathic medicine with their conventional treatments. Many natural medicines have been proven to increase survival rates, help chemotherapy work better and to decrease chemotherapy side effects so that treatment is more tolerable.

On the flip side, many natural medicines can interfere with chemotherapy and radiation, so it is essential to consult with a Naturopathic doctor to ensure your safety.

Wishing you a happy and healthy Fall season,

*Dr. Amanda Guthrie, ND*