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# BREAST CANCER:

can you beat the odds?

**T**he American Cancer Society estimates that 178,480 women in the United States will be diagnosed with new cases of breast cancer in 2007. They estimate that 40,460 women will die from the disease.

These statistics strike terror into even the strongest female heart, especially since there are so many risk factors that are completely out of our control. We can't do anything about risk factors like being a woman, having a family history of cancer, age at onset of menstruation, or the age menopause begins.

But women can put the odds more in their favor by improving their diet, maintaining a healthy weight, and increasing their level of physical activity. These proactive steps have all been linked to reducing the risk of developing breast cancer.

Nothing is absolute and nothing has been conclusively proven to protect you from developing breast cancer. However, it is certainly worth your while to consider adopting one or more of the following recommendations. The worst that can happen is that your overall health and well-being will be enhanced. Go for it!

## WEIGHT

The leaner you are, the lower the risk. There is an established link between excess weight and breast cancer. The more body fat a woman has, the more estrogen she typically produces, therefore increasing her risk for breast cancer.

## EXERCISE

You already know that vigorous and regular exercise can help you achieve and maintain a healthy weight. Another benefit is that it lowers the levels of circulating estrogen, which in turn lowers the risk for breast cancer. Every four hours of rigorous exercise in a week translates to an average reduction in risk of 30% to 40%. That's worth exercising for!

## NUTRITION

It's hard for researchers to accurately study and track people's diets over a long period of time. Consequently, it's difficult to identify and isolate specific cancer-fighting, or cancer-causing, components. Most of the recommendations made here are things you know to do anyway. So, the fact that they could also lessen your risk of breast cancer is all the more reason to start them or keep them up:

**Saturated fat**, the infamous artery-clogging substance, is also theorized to increase a woman's risk for breast cancer. All the more reason to follow the guidelines and keep your intake under 20 grams daily.

**Omega 3 fatty acids**, on the other hand, are said to improve heart function and minimize inflammation. They have been linked to a drop in a woman's risk for breast cancer. If you're not consuming omega-3-rich fish most days (think salmon, cod, halibut, sardines), consider supplementing with two grams of fish oil daily.

**Hormone Residue** can be found in food, but exposure can be minimized when you look for organic beef and dairy products. Organic poultry is good, but not necessary, as it is illegal for even conventionally raised poultry to be given hormones.

**Alcohol** appears to increase estrogen production. Some research shows that the risk of developing breast cancer goes up about 7% for each drink per day. The type of alcohol doesn't really seem to matter - beer, wine, and liquor all increase the risk for breast cancer, according to several recent studies. Experts say that for occasional social drinkers, alcohol consumption isn't likely to affect risk at all.

But for women who want to do everything possible to decrease their risk, then limiting alcohol, or avoiding it altogether, is advisable.

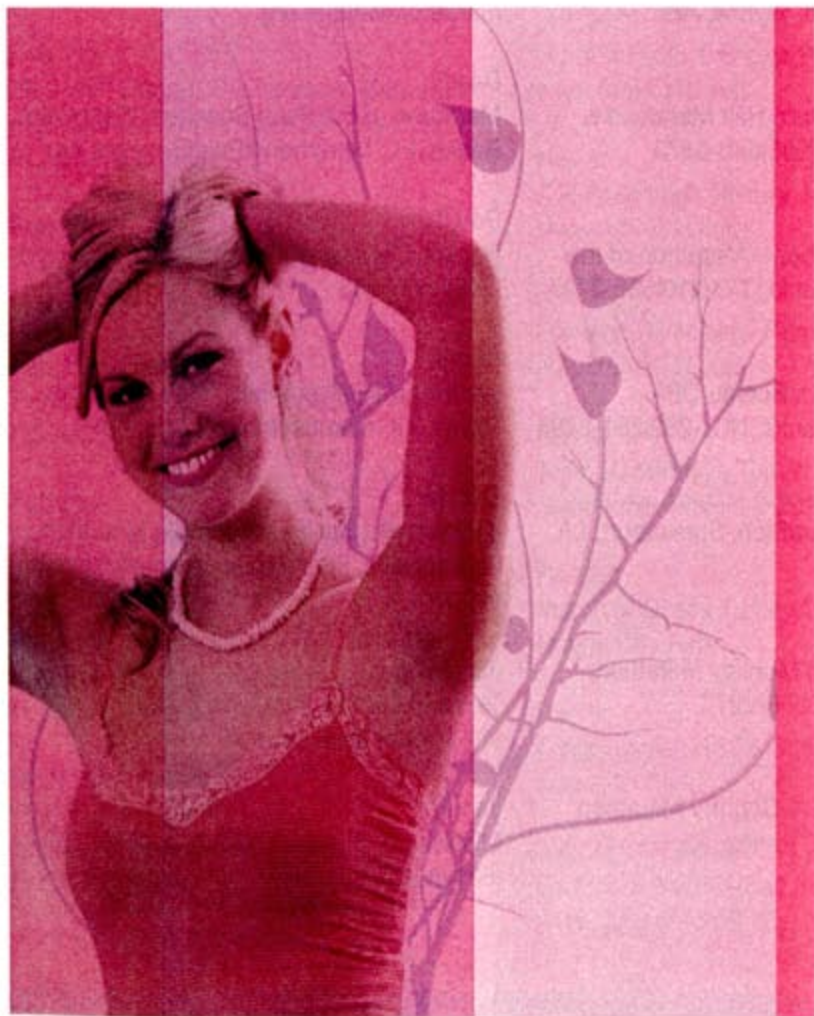
There is strong evidence that diets high in fruits and vegetables have protective effects against certain types of cancer. Though breast cancer has not yet proven to be one of these types of cancer, there is still good reason to pack your diet with nutrient-dense, phytochemical-rich fruits and vegetables. In fact, the American Cancer Society asserts that if Americans were to eat a healthy, balanced diet emphasizing plant foods that help them maintain a healthy weight, as many as one-third of all cancer deaths in the U. S. could be prevented. Which fruits and veggies are best? All of them, really. Rotating a variety of fruits and veggies through your diet is the best way to ensure you're getting the highest possible level of natural vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals.

Soy is a controversial topic, especially when it comes to breast cancer. Soy contains isoflavones, which have a weak estrogenic effect. Our body's estrogen is much stronger than these estrogen-like compounds in soy. Theoretically, if the isoflavones replace the body's estrogen in the cell's receptors, it is possible that soy will protect against estrogen-dependent breast cancer. There is evidence, though,

that soy protein may cause estrogen-dependent breast tumors to grow faster, in direct relationship to how much soy is consumed. Your best bet would be to stick with whole soy foods and avoid concentrated powders or pills, which contain more concentrated amounts of isoflavones.

For women currently undergoing treatment for breast cancer or for breast cancer survivors, be sure to check with your physician before taking any over-the-counter herbal or dietary supplements, since some of them could possibly interfere with treatment.

*The bottom line is that a woman can do everything in her power to lessen her risk for breast cancer and still get the dreaded diagnosis. But rather than live in fear of the disease, focus on living life to the fullest, and taking the best care of your body that you know how to - after all, it's the only one you've got.*



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