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Health Sciences Information Service

Alaska's Medical Library

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Breast cancer news and resources

In the United States, one out of every eight women develops breast cancer in her lifetime. The disease kills 43,300 women a year, making it the leading cause of cancer death for women after lung cancer. Few people remain untouched by this disease.

Early detection

Breast cancer screening methods have come a long way. Mammography, followed by ultrasound and biopsy can quickly indicate whether a lump is benign or malignant and guide the urgency of treatment. However, one study suggests that women may not recognize certain symptoms as potential indicators of cancer, and delay reporting them. Inverted nipples, puckering or dimpling

of the breast, and red-orange discoloration of the breast that is peel-like in appearance, may indicate advanced cancer that needs immediate treatment. Despite recent controversy, it appears breast self-examination is still valuable in early detection. (*Br J Gen Pract.* 2001 Dec;51(473):967-71.)

New risks identified

The American Cancer Society has reported that older women who gained 20 to 30 pounds after high school graduation are 40% more likely to get breast cancer than women who keep the weight off. This is because fat cells synthesize estrogen. The risk doubles if the weight gain is more than 70 pounds. It is estimated that weight contributes between one third and one half of all breast cancer deaths among older women. (*Cancer Epidemiol Biomarkers Prev.* 2004;13(2):220-4.) Smoking also jump-starts cancer according to a Canadian study. Teenage girls almost double their risk of developing breast cancer if they take up smoking within five years of their first menstrual periods, when fast growing tissue is very susceptible to carcinogens. (*Lancet.* 2002 Oct 5;360(9339):1044-9.) Antibiotic use may also raise the risk. A new study of more than 10,000 women in Washington State concluded that women who used the most antibiotics doubled their chances of developing breast cancer, and the risk went up with the number of prescriptions. (*JAMA.* 2004 Feb 18;291(7):827-35.)

New treatment options

Thousands of women who have survived breast cancer could significantly cut their chances of recurrence by switching from Tamoxifen to one of the new aromatase inhibitors, a large international study reported last week. The preliminary results were released early so women could consult with their physicians about changing medications. The new drugs include Aromasin, Femara and Arimidex. (*N Engl J Med.* 2004 Mar 11;350(11):1081-92.)

Resources

Breastcancer.org Reliable, complete, and up-to-date information about breast cancer from a dedicated Non-profit. Includes prevention, diagnosis, treatment, recovery & support. <http://www.breastcancer.org/>

National Cancer Institute. Science behind the news: Understanding cancer. <http://press2.nci.nih.gov/sciencebehind/cancer/cancer00.htm>

NexProfiler treatment option tool for breast cancer <http://tinyurl.com/2zpl8>

National Cancer Institute. Prepared breast cancer searches on PubMed. <http://tinyurl.com/ytgq2>

Women's Cancer Network. Cancer risk assessment survey. <http://www.wcn.org/interior.cfm?diseaseid=13&featureid=3>

The Breast Cancer Site. Educational articles, videos and help fund free mammograms. <http://www.thebreastcancersite.com>

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