

RIVERWALK NATURAL HEALTH CLINIC
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BREAST CANCER PREVENTION

RISK FACTORS

- **Family history:** A close family member having breast cancer increases a woman's chance of developing breast cancer by two to three times. This risk is higher if the relative developed the disease before menopause.
- **Age:** The incidence of breast cancer rises sharply after age 50.
- **Early puberty:** Menstruation before the age of 12 results in a 20% higher risk of developing breast cancer. This is believed to be due to higher levels of circulating estrogens over woman's lifetime.
- **Late menopause:** This is due to the same reason as early puberty.
- **Delayed childbearing:** Women who have children before the age of 18 have a reduced risk of breast cancer.
- **Previous cancer history:** A history of other cancers increases the risk of breast cancer.

There are many risk factors for the development of breast cancer. Some of them like family history and age of puberty or menopause are out of our control. Many others are within our control and may decrease your risk of breast cancer:

PREVENTION

Nutrition: There is strong evidence to support the role of a good diet in the prevention of breast cancer. A low fat, high fiber, and high complex carbohydrate diet is well documented in the prevention of cancer in general. Research shows that a diet high in saturated fats and possibly monounsaturated fat is linked to an increased risk of breast cancer. Studies support an intake of 10 to 15% fat is protective, and the protection is greater when a low fat diet is begun at an early age.

Dietary fiber may be important in the prevention of breast cancer. Some breast cancer is estrogen sensitive and fiber may increase the excretion of estrogen in the digestive tract. Vegetarian women have been found to excrete 2-3 times as much estrogen as women who eat meat. Many red meats also contain synthetic hormones including estrogen.

Women who are postmenopausal and overweight have higher levels of breast cancer, probably due to increased levels of estrogen from the adipose tissue. A healthy, low fat, high fiber diet can decrease weight while protecting against breast cancer. High sugar intake is a major risk factor for the development of breast cancer in women over age 45. This may be due to the suppressive effects of sugar on the immune system and may be linked to a decreased intake of complex carbohydrates in the diet.

Alcohol has been implicated in a 40 to 60% increase in the risk of breast cancer, even in moderation. If you would like help with decreasing your alcohol consumption, talk to your naturopathic physician. Vitamin C appears to be deficient in the diets of women who have breast cancer. Vitamin A and beta carotene have been shown to prevent oxidative damage to cells that predispose to cancer.

Hormonal Medications: Oral contraceptives that have been taken for long term and from an early age increase the risk of breast cancer in premenopausal women. Estrogen replacement therapy has been implicated in the development of breast cancer during the time that a woman is taking ERT. Having a longer reproductive life from age of onset of menses to age of menopause, results in higher estrogen levels for a longer time period and increases the risk of breast cancer. This suggests that artificially increasing estrogen levels may also be a risk factor.

SUPPORTIVE THERAPIES

Naturopathic medicine uses nutritional counseling, exercise, botanical medicines, homeopathy and hydrotherapy to help the body's immune response. A very low fat, low sugar, no alcohol, high fiber and complex carbohydrate diet including fresh organic fruits and vegetables is recommended. Therapeutic doses of certain nutrients such as vitamin C, E, B complex, beta carotene, and selenium may be recommended as dietary supplements. Developing an individualized program of mild to moderate exercise can also assist immune stimulation and mental well being.