

# Breast Cancer—Beating The Odds

*November 2002*

Heart disease is still the number one cause of death for women in the United States, but cancer comes in a close second. Statistics show that breast cancer will strike one out of every eight women in the United States, with the incidence rate increasing with age.

Can diet help you to prevent breast cancer? Here's what the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) and the American Cancer Society (ACS) have to say.

## **Get Moving!**

Research is showing that the risk of cancer of the breast, prostate, endometrium, kidney, colon and rectum are all reduced in people who exercise. Exercise, it seems, is beneficial in reducing breast cancer risk for two reasons. First, it helps to prevent weight gain and excess weight is a risk factor in the development of breast cancer. Second, it moderates the levels of estrogen and insulin, the so-called "growth hormones" in the blood stream. Lower levels mean less cell division and less risk of cancer.

## **Eat A Healthy Diet**

Follow these easy steps:

1. Reduce portion size.
2. Eat more vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans each day. Plant-based diets not only increase potentially protective phytochemicals but they also increase fiber. Some experts believe that dietary fiber will lower circulating estrogen levels and protect against breast cancer.
3. Limit your intake of high-fat foods, especially high fat meats.

## **Avoid Alcohol**

Reduce or eliminate your intake of alcohol. Alcohol has been identified as an independent breast cancer risk factor plus it contains lots of calories with little nutrient value and can lead to weight gain. According to the American Cancer Society "alcohol can increase a woman's chances of getting breast cancer... It doesn't appear that the type of alcohol a woman drinks makes any difference. Beer, wine and liquor all increase the risk of breast cancer, according to several recent studies."

## **What's New?**

Are there any "miracle foods" out there? Do the isoflavones in soy decrease breast cancer risk? Recent research has been conflicting so the current recommendation is to eat moderate amounts of soy foods and avoid isoflavone supplements. Flax seed also contains substances (lignans and alpha-linolenic acid) which may offer breast cancer protection. According to Dr. Lilian Thompson, a flax expert from the University of Toronto, "Most people can eat flaxseed in moderation—about one tablespoon of ground flax a day—as part of a healthy diet." However, until clinical studies are completed, women with hormone-dependent breast cancer and those taking drugs like tamoxifen should limit or avoid eating large amounts of flax.

For more information check out:

[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

[www.aicr.org](http://www.aicr.org)

*Kate Cerulli*

University Dietitian