

## **Complementary Care for Breast Cancer**

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With over 200,000 newly diagnosed cases of breast cancer this year, and over 2 million breast cancer survivors alive today, most everyone in America has been touched, in some way, by this disease. It is the most common cancer among women, accounting for 1 in every 3 cancer diagnoses. And, it will claim over 40,000 American lives this year (Komen).

While breast cancer death rates are declining due to advancements in cancer treatment, the surgery, radiation and chemotherapy treatments are still very taxing to the body, depleting the body's vital energy, and injuring the immune system. Oriental Medicine is a great complementary care option to lessen the side effects, and strengthen the body.

### **Oriental Medicine for Breast Cancer:**

Though Oriental Medicine is a complete system of primary care, most Doctors of Oriental Medicine, myself included, do not treat cancer per se; instead, we offer supportive treatment, using acupuncture, Chinese herbal formulas, and homeopathic remedies to reduce the toxicity and side effects of conventional cancer treatments (before, during and after) and to provide support for the overall health and immunity of the body.

Nausea, poor appetite, bowel disturbance and weight loss are common side effects of chemotherapy. Oriental Medicine can significantly ease these symptoms. Acupuncture treatments and Chinese herbal formulas can harmonize the stomach and digestion, build the immune system, decrease swelling and pain, and increase the rate of healing (such as from surgery) as well as boost energy levels (Fratkin). Research shows that combining Oriental Medicine with conventional therapies leads to better treatment results with fewer hemoglobin changes, higher white blood cell counts, and lower recurrence rates than conventional therapy alone (Fratkin).

Another treatment option is acupressure massage. Using the same points as acupuncture, acupressure applies gentle sustained finger pressure, rather than needles. It is a perfect choice

for those who are afraid of needles, or who just want to experience positive and supportive touch.

A side effect of acupuncture and acupressure sessions is the deep sense of relaxation and wellbeing that is often experienced. It can greatly increase a cancer patient's quality of life and healing ability.

### **Supportive Lifestyle Changes:**

In addition to receiving Oriental Medicine complementary care, there are natural lifestyle adjustments you can make to increase your chances of beating breast cancer and preventing recurrence.

Choose natural deodorants instead of antiperspirants. Sweating assists detoxification, and, it is wise to allow your body to release any toxicity in the underarm areas, as they are so close to the breasts and axillary lymph nodes.

Most breast cancers are estrogen-driven. This is why breast cancer risk is often increased by the use of hormone contraceptive agents and post-menopausal estrogen replacement therapy (LEF, Spangler). Though necessary for many body functions, prolonged exposure or exposures to very strong forms of estrogen increase risk of many female cancers. In addition to supporting women in choosing safer contraceptive and menopause alternatives, I offer suggestions to limit exposure to exogenous estrogens and to assist the natural breakdown and removal of excess estrogen from the body.

Hormones found in non-organic meat and dairy products as well as organochlorines found in pesticides and herbicides (such as atrazine and dioxins) mimic estrogen in the body. Also found in plastics, such as PVC and polycarbonate, these chemicals leach into food and water. Paper products like cups, coffee filters, napkins, toilet tissue and tampons are bleached using organochlorines. Known as xenoestrogens, these chemicals work like estrogen in the body, but they stay a much longer time than natural estrogen does, which can stimulate uncontrolled cell growth. (Spangler, Sprecher.)

Though you cannot eliminate your exposure, you can decrease your consumption of xenoestrogens by choosing organic meats, dairy products and produce, and opting for glass,

ceramic or stainless steel, rather than plastic. Also, choose natural cotton or non-bleached feminine hygiene and paper products. Lastly, avoid cleansers with chlorine bleach; instead use hydrogen peroxide in cleaning.

If you are able to, engaging in some form of daily light exercise will promote circulation and detoxification, and ensure oxygenation of body tissues. Additionally, I recommend having at least 20 minutes set aside every day for relaxing, meditating, praying, or journal writing to acknowledge and release stress and recognize the blessings in your life; this simple step can make all the difference to your recovery.

### **Supportive Diet & Nutrition:**

According to Oriental Medicine, a diet and lifestyle that promotes a healthy liver also promotes healthy breasts (Wolfe). The liver is essential for overall health, and is specific for estrogen-driven diseases, because it rids the body of toxins, including excess estrogen from the body. For this, it requires adequate fiber (from veggies and whole grains) and B vitamins (from dark leafy greens) (Mills & Vernon). Acupuncture and Chinese herbs also support the liver in its detoxification processes.

Alcohol not only taxes the liver, but increases estrogen in the body, as does a high amount of dietary fat, so limiting their consumption is wise (LEF). Maintaining a healthy body weight is important; because fat tissue produces estrogen, being overweight increases your estrogen exposure (Komen).

A breast health-promoting diet consists of 40-50% whole fresh organic vegetables (raw or lightly steamed). Cooked or sprouted whole, unprocessed grains should comprise 30-40% of your diet. Brown rice, millet, barley, buckwheat, and amaranth benefit the body's vital energy and provide fiber. It is imperative that you eliminate processed foods, breads (which contain processed grain flours), sugar, coffee, alcohol, salt and chemical additives from your diet. Choosing only organic meats that comprise 10% of your diet is recommended. The last 10-15% is accounted for by organic dairy products (if there is no dairy sensitivity), raw unsalted nuts, organic beans, whole fresh fruits and expeller-pressed oils (Wolfe).

Drinking eight 8 ounce glasses of pure non-chlorinated water ensures proper hydration and assists detoxification.

### **Specific Anti-Cancer Foods:**

A compound in cruciferous veggies, (broccoli, cauliflower, green cabbage, brussel sprouts, turnips and kale) known as I3C has been found in numerous studies to transform the strong forms of estrogen (which are more dangerous) to the weak forms of estrogen (which are more healthful), and inhibit the growth of cancer cells by 54-61%. It also provokes some cancer cells to self-destruct, so, eat your broccoli! (LEF) Green tea is another cancer inhibitor (LEF). The recommendation is 3-5 cups per day. Other foods that have demonstrated anti-cancer activity are carrots, and shitake mushrooms. Beets, radishes and asparagus are detoxifying and cleansing (Pitchford).

Oriental Medicine, which includes acupuncture, Chinese herbs, dietary therapy and lifestyle recommendations, is a valuable natural complementary therapy, whether you are currently undergoing breast cancer treatment, focusing on preventing recurrence, or looking to lower your risk for breast cancer in general.

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