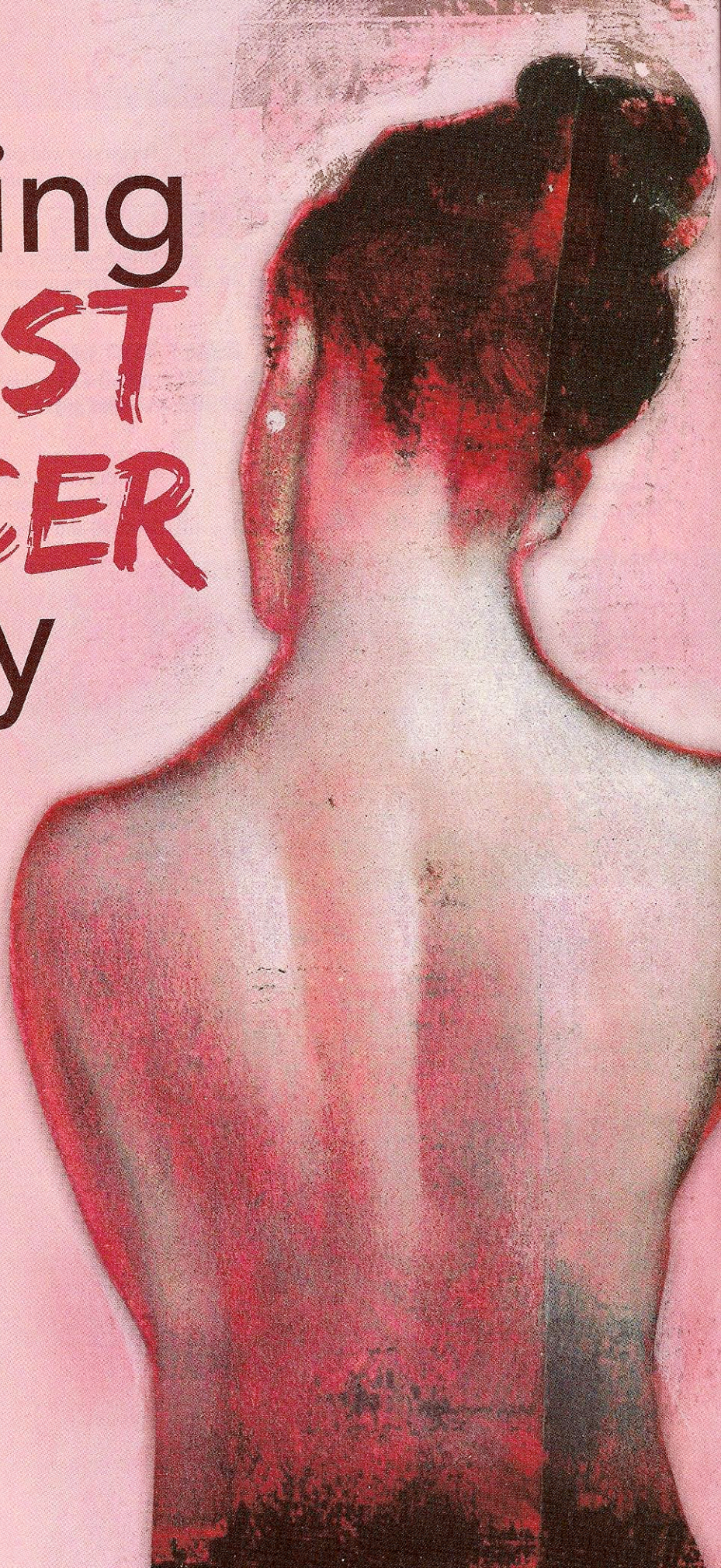


# Keeping **BREAST CANCER** at Bay

By Jessica Ridenour

The only thing more difficult than being treated for breast cancer is living with the possibility of recurrence. While nothing can eliminate that risk entirely, it is possible to reduce your chances of having to fight the cancer monster yet again.

**I**f you're one of the over 2 million breast cancer survivors in the US, congratulations. You've braved a tough fight—and you may even have the battle scars to prove it. And the news just keeps getting better: Studies show that healthy lifestyle changes can significantly reduce your risk for breast cancer recurrence. ▶





*Energy Times* asked breast cancer experts about what survivors can do to naturally prevent recurrence; as it turns out, preventing recurrence and preventing onset in the first place aren't much different from one another. What is it that puts survivors at risk for another malignancy? "It's a combination of doing the wrong things and not doing the right things," says Christine Horner, MD, FACS, and author of *Waking the Warrior Goddess: Dr. Christine Horner's Program to Protect Against and Fight Breast Cancer* (Basic Health Publications). "What you put in your mouth is huge."

Read on for advice on nutrition, sleep and exercise that will hopefully keep you happy and healthy for many years to come. (For information on cancer screenings, see the box at right.)

#### THE RIGHT THINGS:

**Eat more plants.** The verdict is unanimous on this one: Eating more colorful fruits and vegetables is one of the strongest lines of defense you can employ in keeping the cancer beast at bay. Dark leafy greens, berries and cruciferous vegetables (broccoli, cauliflower, kale, cabbage, Brussels sprouts and bok choy) are particularly rich in protective, cancer-fighting *phytochemicals*. Studies show populations with the least cancer and heart disease (such as the people of Okinawa, Japan) eat five or more servings of fruit and vegetables a day. "It doesn't mean you have to be a vegetarian; it just means you need to eat a lot of plants," adds Heather Pena, MD, Medical Director of the St. Helena Center for Health in St. Helena, California. Pena suggests adding more of the four "S" foods to your diet: soups, salads, stir-frys and smoothies. (For more on phytonutrients, see "The Anti-Cancer Color Wheel" on page 25.) Plant foods also contain lots of fiber; in one British study pre-menopausal women who ate at least 30 grams of fiber a day experienced a 52% reduction in breast cancer risk.

**Watch your weight.** "When we're overweight and we have more fat in our bodies, we make more estrogen," says Pena. According to the National Cancer Institute (NCI), estrogen is

flax helps to lower the risk of breast cancer, including effects exactly like those of the drugs Tamoxifen and Arimidex, which are used for women after surgery or chemotherapy," says

#### Get Checked—Regularly

Other than lifestyle changes, the most important action a woman can take is to be regularly screened for cancer. While *mammograms* have been a valuable tool for diagnosing existing breast tumors, they're not perfect in that they miss approximately 20% of malignancies. That's one reason why the American Cancer Society now recommends that women who are at an unusually high risk of developing breast cancer, such as women with a family history of the disease, also undergo annual MRIs as well as mammograms.



Happily, there are alternative breast cancer screening options—the most promising being *thermography*. A non-invasive technique, thermography uses Digital Infrared Imaging (DII) to seek out higher-than-normal temperatures in the breast, which can signal the underlying presence of disease. When a malignancy is forming in the breast, blood flow to the problem area increases in order to feed the tumor. Thermography's infrared images detect these temperature changes, allowing doctors to not only diagnose cancer in its earliest stages, but to even identify future cancer risk.

Before you get too excited about forgoing that plastic breast-flattening clamp, know that thermography is not meant to replace traditional mammograms, but rather to be used in conjunction with mammograms and physical exams. After all, the more tools you have to fight cancer recurrence, the better your chances for a long and healthful life. Find a qualified breast thermography center near you at [www.breastthermography.com/find-a-center.htm](http://www.breastthermography.com/find-a-center.htm).

considered a risk factor because it can promote proliferation of cells in the breast, potentially forming tumors. The American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) recommends limiting lifetime weight gain after the age of 30 to just 11 pounds for optimal health.

**Befriend flax.** As the richest plant source of beneficial *omega-3 fatty acids*, flax has been found to reduce inflammation and decrease estrogen-induced cell division in breast tissue, among other health benefits. "There are over a dozen different ways that

Horner. Fortunately, flax seeds are easy to add to your meal plans; just pulverize them in a coffee grinder and sprinkle on cereal, vegetables or whatever you're hungry for that day. (Flax is also available in oil and supplement forms.)

**Supplement with herbs and spices.** **Turmeric**, the yellow spice used in Indian curries, is a potent antioxidant found to have considerable anti-inflammatory and cancer-protective properties. Horner suggests adding one-quarter tablespoon to food near the end of cooking or



taking two 500 mg supplements each day. According to the AICR, **green tea**, which is also available in supplement form, is another smart dietary choice. Scientific research shows that this wonder tonic, rich in antioxidant-dense polyphenols and flavonoids, can slow or prevent cancer growth and can reduce recurrence of early (stage I) breast cancer. Oregano, rosemary, dill, thyme and garlic also pack a potent antioxidant punch that helps defend against cancer.

**Get regular sleep.** “Going to bed before 10 pm and getting up by 6 am is considered the ideal hours of sleep,” says Horner. This isn’t simply about getting eight hours of beauty rest; it has more to do with the sleep hormone **melatonin**, a powerful antioxidant that slows estrogen production. Horner cites a study done by the NCI in 2001, which showed that night-shift nurses had a 50% increased risk of breast cancer. In order to reap the maximum benefits of melatonin, try to hit the sack by

10 at the latest and make sure your bedroom is completely dark.

**Meditate.** The American Cancer Society (ACS) and the National Institutes for Health (NIH) agree: meditation is a valuable practice for helping to ease anxiety, pain and insomnia, and for reducing blood pressure. It also plays a powerful role in stress reduction—an important function, considering that stress is known to significantly weaken the immune system. Just 15 to 20 minutes twice daily is recommended for optimal results.

#### **THE WRONG THINGS:**

**Eating a high-fat diet.** Results from the Women’s Intervention Nutrition Study (WINS) suggest that women who reduce their fat intake reduce the chance for recurrence or a second cancer. Avoid saturated fats, like those found in red meat or full-fat dairy. A low-fat diet will also help to maintain an ideal weight—another asset when battling cancer recurrence.

**Remaining active.** Aside from eating five or more servings of fruit and vegetables daily, exercise is the other critical element in fending off cancer recurrence. A recent study published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* concludes that five or more hours a week reduces breast cancer risk by 50%. “Even brisk walking would have that effect, so it’s not like you have to go to the gym and be an animal lifting weights and all that stuff,” says Horner.

**Indulging in alcohol.** “There’s a direct linear relationship between the amount of alcohol a woman drinks and how much her risk of breast cancer goes up,” explains Horner. Alcohol not only disrupts the liver’s detoxifying abilities and destroys folate, but it causes the body to produce excess estrogen—a major risk factor.

**Consuming sugar.** “Sugar, when it gets converted into glucose in the blood, is the preferred food for

cancer,” states Horner. “The other thing that happens is when you consume sugar or refined carbohydrates, it goes into your blood system and causes your glucose levels to spike rapidly—the body responds by producing insulin.” High insulin levels have been found to increase risk because the insulin binds to receptors on the tumor cells and acts as a growth factor.

**Being exposed to pesticides and other toxins.** “Nobody is going to claim that pesticides are good for us,” says Pena. “They do kill bugs.” Since many pesticides are estrogens, Pena recommends eating organic whenever possible. Other toxins include known carcinogens like cigarette smoke, mineral oils, radiation, asbestos and more, while the list of probable carcinogens is a mile long. Household cleaning supplies and cosmetics are also carcinogenic culprits; fortunately there are now numerous non-toxic alternatives on the market that are much better for our health (see *Earth Matters* on page 14).

Remember, surviving breast cancer the first time around is only half the battle. The second half: Doing everything you possibly can to increase your chances of a cancer-free future. ■

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### **Don't Let Cancer Invade Your Bedroom**

One of the most under-discussed—but most distressing—of cancer's side effects is how it can stop your love life dead in its tracks. If it has “been a while” for you, check out *Intimacy After Cancer* (Big Think Media, [www.intimacyaftercancer.com](http://www.intimacyaftercancer.com)). Authors Sally Kidd, a psychologist who herself has dealt with breast cancer, and Dana Rowett use both survivors' stories and expert commentary to help you reconnect with your sexual self.