



Putting Your Best Breast Forward

By Dr. Stephanie Peltz, BSc, ND

Breasts: they are universal. However, for some reason most women seem to be in constant battle with their breasts. Breasts are seen as either too small or too large, too high or too low. Women are often flaunting their breasts or hiding them, enhancing them or minimizing them. Some consider breasts a source of food for a hungry baby while others see them as an expression of their sensuality. Isn't it time we made peace with our breasts? I pronounce "*putting your best breast forward*" as a way of creating a loving and healthy relationship with your breasts. There are several positive habits that can be adopted to encourage breast health, and it is never too early (or late) to start.

Facts About Breast Cancer

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women worldwide, and the second leading cause of cancer mortality in Canadian women. One in nine women is expected to develop breast cancer in her lifetime. So if we do not love our breasts, how will we protect them for years to come?

Screening

Get to know your breasts. Become familiar with the normal consistency of your breasts and the underlying tissue. As well, inspect them regularly for changes. Combine this awareness with a **yearly breast exam** by your clinician. In Canada routine **mammograms** are recommended every 2 years for women over the age of 50 (in some regions starting at age 40). Consider **thermography** as an earlier detection tool for abnormalities. This is a noninvasive, radiation-free technique in which infrared light is used to measure the temperature of body tissues. Thermography is a highly sensitive tool for detecting early tissue changes associated with breast cancer. It is best used in combination with physical exam and/or mammography.

Risk

Breast cancer risk factors include smoking, obesity, a sedentary lifestyle, excess alcohol consumption, poor diet, and exposure to unopposed estrogen (estrogen from certain hormone therapies and "xenoestrogen" from food or environmental contaminants). There are different types of estrogens. Some estrogens are protective while others are detrimental, and keeping a healthy balance of these estrogens in the body is extremely important.

Diet

In terms of breast cancer prevention, the best diet to follow is **primarily vegetarian** and incorporates plenty of brightly coloured organic fruits and vegetables daily. Vegetables from the brassica family, such as **cabbage and broccoli** provide indole-3-carbinol, which helps with the production of protective estrogen. **Garlic and onions** should be included liberally in the diet. They contain sulphur compounds which inhibit the growth of breast cancer cells. In order to decrease the effects of detrimental

estrogen on the breast, it is best to **avoid saturated fats** and increase the intake of **omega 3 fats**. A **high fiber** intake will decrease circulating estrogens and reduce the incidence of obesity. Consuming **less than one alcoholic beverage** per day is ideal.

Exercise

Following the above dietary guidelines and incorporating regular exercise into your lifestyle will help you maintain a **healthy body weight**, which is crucial for breast health. Women should exercise most days of the week for a minimum of **30 minutes**. Yoga is particularly beneficial not only for improving physical fitness, but also for reducing stress, stimulating lymphatic flow and creating a healthy relationship with your body.

Don't Forget!

There are several other ways to promote breast health such as choosing natural forms of cleaning and personal care products, sleeping well, increasing liver function, balancing hormones such as thyroid, cortisol and melatonin, and optimizing vitamin D levels. Get to know your risk and start making even the most basic changes today. Put your best foot, *and breast*, forward towards a healthy relationship with your body so that you may be well and happy for years to come.

Dr. Stephanie Peltz, BSc, ND is a licensed naturopathic physician practicing in the Yaletown area of Vancouver. She has a general family practice, with a special interest in promoting women's health. She is currently accepting new patients. For more information go to www.drpeltz.com.