



Four Simple Ways to Optimize Breast Health

By Dr. Cynthia Preston

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For most women, it is increasingly important to pay attention to our reproductive and breast health. We have hormonal receptors throughout our body, including our fat cells, breast tissue and brain tissue. Therefore it is important to understand the role our own hormones and those from the environment on our ability to prevent breast related diseases including breast cancer. Keeping our breasts healthy and our hormones in balance through a variety of factors is the key to physical and emotional balance. So if you have a personal or family history of breast cancer and are concerned about the role our modern environment plays please read the following.

1) Regular, Low-Impact Exercise — you don't have to go to extremes

A regular exercise / movement program is not only the best way to maintain a healthy weight; it's also one of the most powerful protective practices against breast cancer incidence and reoccurrence for *all* women. A recent report from the World Health Organization tells us that there is a 20–40% *decrease* in the risk of developing breast cancer for women who are physically active regardless of menopausal status, type, or intensity of activity. Try taking two stairs at a time, parking further from your destination, practicing yoga or Tai Chi, or even just walking.

2) Enhance Your Estrogen Metabolism — and your detoxification pathways

One of the strongest associations with breast cancer concern higher levels of circulating estrogens in a woman's body, particularly after menopause. Leading-edge research suggest breast health is partially determined by how well we convert and excrete estrogen metabolites in the body. This means effectively transforming both the estrogens that naturally occur in our bodies and xenoestrogens, or those that your body encounters through your diet and environment. Some sources of xenoestrogens include plastics and hormone or anti-biotic fed meat. We now know that heavy exposure to xenoestrogens can increase some women's risk for developing breast cancer. Most environmental toxins and our own toxic hormone byproducts are flushed out through the gut and liver, but if toxins like xenoestrogens build up, they can block natural elimination and provoke a cascade of health issues, including weight gain, inflammation, and hormonal imbalance, which can in turn, increase your risk of breast cancer. Should reactive toxins accumulate in our bodies, we may feel perpetually exhausted, bloated, irritable, or just generally unwell. Ridding the body of these toxins can be of huge benefit for breast cancer prevention.

3) A Good Night's Sleep can put Breast Cancer Cells to rest

Many may simply be unable to sleep due to stress or anxiety — our brains can feel like they're spinning, keeping us awake at night. Current research shows that variation in our nighttime production of melatonin (a hormone that helps regulate our sleep-wake cycle) may be a predictor for whether or not we might develop breast cancer. The same melatonin which makes us all feel sleepy, actually makes breast cancer cells "sleepy" too – in fact, melatonin was shown to slow breast cancer cell growth by 70% in one recent study. Sleeping well isn't about just lying down and closing one's eyes — instead, you can actually *re-train*

your body to sleep, particularly if you're troubled by insomnia. Here are a few simple behaviors you can adopt that favor optimal melatonin production in your brain:

- Dim the lights and find the darkness.
- Aim for eight hours of sleep. How much sleep each woman needs varies, but we usually need 7–9 hours.

4) Vegetarian Diet Promotes Toxin Elimination

A vegetarian diet best supports hormone balance and promotes elimination of toxic build up in both the gastrointestinal tract and within the lymphatic system of the breast. A vegetarian diet focusing on dark greens and cruciferous vegetables has been shown to help detoxification pathways in both the gut and liver. A study presented by Sherwood and colleagues, showed that vegetarians excreted threefold more estrogen in their feces, had lower urinary excretion, and had 15-20% lower plasma estrogen levels. The above studies show a positive correlation between high plasma levels of estrogen and consumption of fat, as well as, a negative correlation with consumption of high fiber diet.

With breast cancer incidence increasing, there's good reason to be concerned about this frightening diagnosis. In spite of this, following the above mentioned recommendation should provide you comfort in knowing you are practicing sensible and reasonable steps to help protect your health.

Dr. Cynthia Preston is a graduate of Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine, in Tempe, Arizona; where she focused on women's health and pediatrics. She specializes in the natural treatment of women's concerns like PMS, menopause, osteoporosis, cardiovascular health, aging and emotional well-being. She provides a combination of botanical medicine, nutritional intervention and bio-identical hormone replacement to restore physical and emotional well-being to her patients.

To learn more about her services or to make an appointment call 909-981-9200.