



October 30, 2010 – Grand Rapids, MI

Breast Health

Nearly everyone is aware of the benefits of exercise in reducing the risk of heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, and many other conditions, but I doubt many women would associate exercise with reducing the risk of breast cancer. Today is the last day of National Breast Cancer Awareness month, so the timing couldn't be better for the study I wanted to talk about in today's message.

The Study

The Nurses' Health Study has followed almost 100,000 women for over 20 years. Some of the studies published haven't been that impressive, especially those on calcium and bone health, but in this case, the researchers asked the right questions, collected enough data to make the results meaningful (1), and continued to follow the women closely. The researchers interviewed the subjects every two to four years to keep track of the subjects' physical activity and any changes that occurred in the activity patterns. In the 20 years of follow-up, close to 5,000 women developed invasive breast cancer. In comparing the physical activity of the subjects who exercised least with those who exercised most, they found that the exercisers had a 15% lower risk of developing breast cancer. Further, when they compared the women who were least active at menopause but increased their activity after, the risk of breast cancer was reduced by 10% compared to the non-exercise group. Okay, so what does all this mean?

First, being active all your life, especially before you reach menopause, confers some protection against developing breast cancer. The more a woman exercises, the lower the risk. But secondly, and maybe even more important, if a woman doesn't start to exercise until after she reaches menopause, she still gets a benefit. You could say that it's never too late to start an exercise program. One important side note: the effects of exercise were beneficial for estrogen and progesterone positive or negative breast cancers.

So what kind of exercise are we talking about—running marathons? No. While the exercise and breast-cancer risk was dose dependent—that means that as they exercised more, the protective effect increased—one hour per day of brisk walking five days per week was all that was necessary. So what is brisk walking? That would equal walking 3.5 to 4.0 mph five days per week. That's hardly intense and you could swim, ride an exercise bike, ballroom dance, or do many other things to get the same benefit.

Think about it: investing an hour a day doing something you don't even have to change clothes for will help you reduce the risk of breast cancer. How cool is that? But one thing that can further help your breasts is to wear the right kind of bra. Check out X-Chrom online for information on how to pick a sports bra. While you're at it, check out the Store at drchet.com to order *Dr. Chet's Health Tips for Women with Dr. Pam*—there's a whole section on sports bras.

What are you prepared to do today?™

Dr. Chet

Reference: Arch Intern Med. 2010;170(19):1758-1764.

WGVU FM 88.5/95.3  ***Straight Talk on Health***

Hear Dr. Chet's take on the latest health news and research—listen to *Straight Talk on Health* at 7 p.m. Sunday in the Eastern Time Zone on WGVU-FM 88.5 or 95.3, or listen live via the Internet by going to www.wgvu.org and clicking on "Listen Live" in the gray bar at the top.

The health information in this message is designed for educational purposes only. It's not a substitute for medical advice from your healthcare provider, and you should not use it to diagnose or treat a health problem or disease. It's designed to motivate you to work toward better health, and that includes seeing your healthcare professional regularly. If what you've read raises any questions or concerns about health problems or possible diseases, talk to your healthcare provider today.

Subscribe to the Message from Dr. Chet at DrChet.com — © Chet Zelasko PhD LLC