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to be growing, especially concerning diet and exercise.

"The standard American diet is killing people," say Ross Polton, R.Ph., Ph.D., C.C.N.; Taffy Clarke Polton, M.A.; and Vinton C. Vint, M.D., in their book "How to Prevent Breast Cancer" (Simon & Schuster/Fireside).

"Women, if you accept the challenge to take charge of your health and prevent breast cancer, one of the most important and effective things you can do is change your diet. A substantial body of research now suggests that high-fat, low-fiber diets, like those consumed in the U.S., increase cancer risk, while plant-based diets rich in fruits, vegetables, legumes and whole grains are protective."

The NCI has sponsored the "Five-a-Day for Better Health" campaign to get Americans to eat five servings a day of fresh fruits and vegetables.

"Medical researchers have concluded that the phytochemicals in these foods can also provide a helpful, relatively simple way to reduce the risk of breast cancer," says Jon J. Michnovicz, M.D., Ph.D., director of the Foundation for Preventive Oncology, in his book, "How to Reduce Your Risk of Breast Cancer" (Warner Books).

"It is my conclusion that a (high-fat, low-fiber) diet is the primary factor in the genesis of breast cancer, while heredity accounts for only a small percentage of cases," says Robert M. Kradjian, M.D., in his book, "Save Yourself From Breast Cancer" (Berkeley Books).

"Diet is the most important component of breast cancer prevention, but exercise is the other."

Exercise can affect not only overall health, but hormone activity as well, which is also associated with breast cancer.

Detection

And while early detection may not prevent breast cancer, it can enhance your protection from its ravages.

Experts estimate that when a breast tumor is found in the smallest stage, the five-year rate of patient survival is up to 95 percent, according to NCI.

"While there is little consensus on whether mammography should be used for screening women under age 50, there is strong agreement that women over age 50 would benefit from mammography," says NCI.

Talk to your doctor about how often you should have mammograms. NCI also urges you to tell your doctor about any unusual changes in your breasts, including:

- A lump or thickening in a breast or armpit.
- A change in size or shape.
- Dimpling or puckering of skin.
- Discharge from nipple.
- Change in color or feel of skin of the breast or area around a nipple.

Treatment

There are basically four types of treatment for breast cancer, according to NCI, sometimes used in conjunction:

surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy and hormone therapy.

The stage of the breast cancer as well as your risk factors and overall health may determine treatments.

Surgical methods range from a lumpectomy, which takes out the lump in the breast and some of the tissue around it, to a radical mastectomy, which removes the entire breast, chest muscle and lymph nodes.

This latter surgical method is used now only when the tumor has spread to chest muscles.

Radiation therapy is the use of high-energy X-rays to kill cancer cells and shrink tumors. Chemotherapy is the use of drugs to kill cancer cells.

Hormone therapy is used to change the way hormones in the body help cancers grow.

"While more and more women are now being offered breast-conserving treatment, commonly called lumpectomy, surveys show about 65 percent of all breast cancer patients still undergo mastectomies," says Rita Baron-Faust, and the physicians of The New York University Medical Center Women's Health Service, in the book "Breast Cancer: What Every Woman Should Know" (Hearst Books). "Understanding the different types of breast cancer surgery and which is best in your particular case may help make the ultimate choice of treatment less difficult."

Promising research

Hope may be on the horizon. NCI

breast cancer research continues:

About half of NCI funds supports basic laboratory research, currently focusing on the cell biology of normal and malignant breast tissue growth.

In September 1994, researchers located breast cancer susceptibility genes, BRCA-1 and BRCA-2. NCI says "finding such genes will enhance our ability to identify women at higher risk."

NCI continues studies on the role in breast cancer of diet, hormonal therapy, obesity, alcohol consumption and on-the-job exposure to radiation. NCI is developing new technology in diagnostic imaging to improve early detection through mammograms and biopsies.

Taxol, a drug approved by the FDA in 1994 for treatment of breast cancer, is spurring an active search for synthetic or semisynthetic forms of the drug. A family of new chemotherapeutic agents called anthracyclins has also shown very high response rates in women with treated advanced breast cancer.

Use of tamoxifen, an anti-estrogen, in clinical studies has shown it suppresses recurrence of breast cancer while it also prevents occurrence of second primary breast cancers.

Other approaches still under study include use of monoclonal antibodies to treat a cancer cell, experimental gene therapy, techniques to restore bone marrow destroyed during chemotherapy and even development of vaccines against breast cancer.

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