

LEF Magazine June 1998

COVER STORY

Standard Treatments

Standard Side Effects

Continued from Menopause Stopping the Symptoms before they stop you

Cancers of the breast, uterus and ovary account for 41 percent of cancer incidence among U.S. women. Breast cancer is running at epidemic levels, striking one in nine women, up from only one in 30 in 1960. Conventional estrogen-replacement therapy and estrogen-based oral contraceptives have been used extensively since 1960. Clearly, an alternative is needed to provide the anti-aging benefits of estrogen while protecting against its cancer-causing effects.

Does estrogen, in fact, cause cancer? Many doctors don't think so, while others think that combining estrogen with a synthetic progestin (a form of progesterone) neutralizes the cancer-causing risk of estrogen. Some studies show that estrogen does not cause cancer in the short-term, but in women taking estrogen and/or a synthetic progestin for more than 10 years, there appears to be a significantly elevated risk of breast, ovarian and uterine cancer.

In addition to an increased risk of breast cancer from using estrogen drugs, a report published in the American Journal of Epidemiology (May 1995) showed that long-term estrogen replacement therapy increased the risk of fatal ovarian cancer. This seven-year study included 240,073 pre- and post-menopausal women. After adjusting for other risk factors, women who used estrogen for six to eight years had a 40 percent higher risk of fatal ovarian cancer, while women who used estrogen for 11 or more years had a shocking 70 percent higher risk of fatal ovarian cancer.

The most popular estrogen drug in the United States is Premarin, which contains estrogens derived from the urine of pregnant mares. Other popular estrogen drugs are sold under the names Estrace and Estraderm. Provera is the name of a popular synthetic progestin that, when taken with Premarin, helps to prevent estrogen-induced uterine cancer, but does not prevent estrogen-induced breast or ovarian cancer.

Estrogen and progestin drugs both have well-documented side effects that cause many women to avoid using them. In addition to increased cancer risks, some of the other risks include weight gain, abnormal blood clot formation (thrombosis), increased risk of gallstones, fibroid tumors and headaches, and premenstrual-type symptoms (irritability, fluid retention). Despite these unpleasant and sometimes lethal side effects, many women use estrogen drugs because of their anti-aging properties, which include enhanced skin smoothness, firmness, and elasticity; better moistness of skin and mucus membranes; enhanced muscle tone; reduced genital atrophy and enhanced sex drive; and reduced menopausal miseries such as hot flashes and anxiety.

Estrogen replacement also reduces the risk of heart disease and osteoporosis, lowers the risk of colon cancer, improves memory and neurologic function, protects against Alzheimer's disease, enhances immune function, and generally leaves one with a greater feeling of well-being. The question, of course, is how to achieve this Nirvana without running afoul of estrogen's potent side effects.

**Soy's
Multiple
Benefits**

Soy does more than serve as a therapy for menopausal symptoms. It's a potent disease preventative as well.

Based upon records of dietary soy consumption in Japan, where breast cancer incidence is very low, daily soy isoflavone intake has been estimated at 50 mg per day. The typical Western diet, on the other hand, only provides 1 to 5 mg a day of the soy isoflavones that may protect against several forms of cancer.

Not only are certain cancer levels lower in those who consume soy, but menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes and the

incidence of osteoporosis are reduced. And one study showed that soy isoflavones produced an anabolic effect on bone density in post-menopausal women by binding to an estrogen receptor in bone.

A major cause of the breast cancer epidemic may be the widespread use of insecticides, fungicides, manufacturing chemicals, and chlorine-based substances that mimic and mutate estrogen. These fat-soluble substances called "hormone modulating pollutants" accumulate in the body over time, and are being recognized as a contributing factor in the development of hormone-related cancers.

Women with breast cancer have high levels of estrogen-altering pesticide residue in their breast fat cells, compared with women who do not have breast cancer. Soy contains "friendly estrogens" that block estrogen-receptor sites on cells that are vulnerable to attack by carcinogenic "mutated" estrogens.

According to peer-reviewed scientific studies, soy phytoestrogens have been shown to:

- Prevent cancer at multiple sites
- Prevent gallstones
- Protect kidney function
- Stimulate bone formation
- Lower cholesterol levels
- Inhibit the oxidation of LDL cholesterol
- Inhibit the development or progression of atherosclerosis

While the health benefits of soy are well documented in the scientific literature, it has been difficult and expensive, up until now, to obtain the amount of genistein and other soy isoflavones that scientists say may treat menopausal symptoms and prevent age-related diseases.

The Life Extension Foundation introduced a new soy extract in late 1997 that contains enough phytoestrogens from soy to provide double the amount of genistein, daidzein and glycitein found in the typical Japanese diet. This soy extract is so concentrated that only a small amount is needed to obtain enough phytoestrogens to potentially provide effective estrogen replacement for many women.

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