

LOW-FAT DIET FOUND TO CUT RECURRENCE OF BREAST CANCER

Those on regime 24% less likely to relapse than others, study says

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ORLANDO, Fla.—Breast-cancer patients who switched to low-fat diets cut their risk of recurring tumors when compared with women who ate almost twice as much fat, according to a study released yesterday.

The women in the diet group did not follow a strict meal plan but limited fat to about 30 grams a day by choosing less fatty alternatives in their daily meals.

These patients were 24 percent less likely to suffer a relapse than those eating typical amounts of fat, or about 51 grams a day.

While doctors long have pushed good nutrition as a way to ward off cancer in the first place, this study shows that a low-fat approach might aid in keeping the disease from returning.

The findings were released at the American Society of Clinical Oncology's annual meeting.

“Patients are always asking what changes they can make in their diets to prevent their cancer from coming back, and until now, we haven't had any good data to pass along to them,” said Dr. Robert Morgan of the City of Hope Cancer Center in California.

Dr. Morgan, who was not involved in the study of more than 2,100 women, cautioned that the findings do not apply equally to all breast-cancer patients.

Women who benefited most were those with tumors that are considered “estrogen-negative,” as opposed to “estrogen-positive.” Breast-cancer tumors are categorized depending on whether the hormone fuels their growth.

Patients with estrogen-negative tumors reduced their chances of a relapse by 42 percent when they followed a low-fat diet. In contrast, estrogen-positive patients had a 15-percent reduction in risk, which did not reach statistical significance.

The study's lead author said the findings are sending an overall signal that low-fat diets may be crucial for some cancer patients. Dr. Rowan Chlebowski of the Los Angeles Biomedical Research Institute said it's hard to pin down exactly why the diet might help.

“There are thousands of proteins that are going to be different in the blood of someone who is on a low-fat diet versus a fatty diet,” he said.

The study randomly assigned women to either the low-fat or standard-diet groups. All the women were postmenopausal breast-cancer patients in early stages who already had undergone standard treatment such as surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, and medications.

The study took place from 1994 to 2001 at cancer centers in 37 sites in the United States. The women were followed for an average of five years, with 975 patients in the low-fat group and 1,462 in the standard group.

Overall, 9.8 percent of the women in the low-fat group had a cancer recurrence while 12.4 percent on the standard diet suffered a relapse.

Some experts, including the American Cancer Society, cautioned yesterday that the findings are too preliminary to draw any sweeping conclusions. The society wants more research but noted that no harm could come from a balanced, low-fat diet.

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