



# BEAT breast cancer

Despite aggressive screening and millions poured into research, this disease shows no sign of slowing. **Louise O'Connor** has a positive prevention plan.

**B**reast cancer continues to devastate the lives of far too many. More alarming is the fact that the incidence of breast cancer is on the rise. Some health activists now argue it's time to demystify this disease and tackle the very real causes of this deadly epidemic.

For an overwhelming majority of women, breast cancer is not passed on by way of genes; it is acquired over many years. Awareness is growing of the unacceptable burden that a lifetime of toxic exposure may have on risk. Women are continually bombarded with a cocktail of dangerous environmental chemicals which have the potential to fuel cancer cell growth.

## Environmental triggers

Mounting evidence - including recent major studies in the *International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health and Cancer* - indicates exposure to numerous environmental pollutants is contributing to the rapidly rising breast cancer rates observed over the past several decades. Along with widespread global industrialisation, an extensive range of chemicals have flooded the environment. As individuals and as a population we are now exposed to shifting patterns of use and these toxic compounds tend to be released into the environment as mixtures, rather than individual chemicals.

Harmful substances from our increas-

ingly polluted world can act as mammary carcinogens, which are chemicals that cause mammary tumours in animals, and endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs). Deep within the body, more and more human-made environmental chemicals are interacting at a cell level with devastating adverse effects. Persistent organic pollutants (POPs) are synthetic chemicals that are regarded as the most dangerous. POPs remain intact in the environment for long periods, become widely distributed geographically, accumulate in the fatty tissue of living organisms and are toxic to humans and wildlife. POPs circulate globally and can cause damage wherever they travel.

## The dirty dozen

The 'dirty dozen', as they are known, are the most dangerous POPs. They include nine organochlorine pesticides, along with

polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), dioxins and furans. These chemicals have a history of use in pest control, crop production and industry. POPS are highly stable and can resist degradation for a long time.

The authority to influence major initiatives to beat rising breast cancer incidence may be beyond the control of the individual. However, we do all have the power to take individual action to reduce contact with hazardous environmental toxins. Some steps you can take right now to make your everyday living a little greener include: choose organically produced food to minimise your chemical exposure and the toxic burden on the environment; use eco-friendly household cleaning products; avoid wearing perfume and other products with fragrances; and change to plastic-free food storage containers. To educate yourself about

## Yoga for cancer care

For women fighting breast cancer, taking up yoga can have huge emotional benefits. A study reported in *Psycho-Oncology* found that women with breast cancer who attended yoga classes once a week had a 50 percent reduction in depression and a 12 percent increase in feelings of peace after the sessions. Interestingly, the findings were strongest in those women who started the classes with greater negativity and fear.



## Bitter melon breakthrough

According to a study from St Louis University, published in *Cancer Research*, bitter melon (*Momordica charantia*) extract, which is already known as a traditional remedy for diabetes in Ayurvedic medicine, has also been shown to exert a significant effect against breast cancer cells. The test tube study showed that the extract decreased the growth and division of breast cancer cells, while also inducing their death.



reducing chemical exposure for you and your family, visit The Green Guide at [www.thegreenguide.com](http://www.thegreenguide.com).

## 'Pink-washing'

For women, there is little doubt that toxic chemicals contained within cosmetics and personal care products provide a major route of exposure. Despite their potential to cause harm, many synthetic chemicals contained in these products are largely unregulated. Back in 2003, Breast Cancer Action coined the term 'pinkwashing', referring to companies that exploit the good intentions of consumers by promoting pink ribbon products which are in themselves linked to breast cancer. A growing number of ethical companies now agree that safe is beautiful. Positive buying favours products from progressive companies who are truly committed to consumer safety.

## The latest news

**Bisphenol A:** The American Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently joined a chorus of concerns over bisphenol A (BPA). Exposure to this endocrine disruptor is widespread as it leaches into food from the protective internal coatings of canned foods and from consumer products, such as polycarbonate tableware, food storage containers, water bottles and baby bottles.

**Dietary fibre:** You may not be able to change your family history, but you can

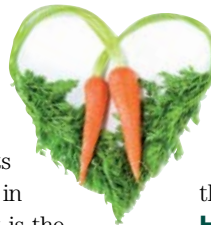


# did you know?

According to a study from Marshall University in the USA, eating a handful of omega-3-rich walnuts daily may reduce the incidence of breast cancer.



control what you eat and drink. According to a review in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, consuming more vegetables and whole grains, and drinking less alcohol might trim your chance of developing breast cancer. In addition, research reveals new insights into why a fibre-rich diet confers protection. Beneficial dietary fibre plays a broader role than previously speculated. Soluble fibre controls insulin and insulin-like growth factors. It is well established insulin acts as a powerful growth promoter in breast tissue. A low sugar diet is the best way to reduce insulin levels.



**Breast implants:** Considerable safety concerns have been raised regarding silicone gel-filled breast implants. Despite evidence that implants can interfere with mammographic visualisation, there is limited long term evidence available to establish breast cancer risk. However the body's normal response to a foreign object such as a breast implant is to form a shell or a capsule of scar tissue around it. In Australia, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) continues to investigate the safety of implants. If you experience unusual breast symptoms associated with breast implants, contact your medical specialist immediately for follow-up.

**Vitamin D:** Compelling evidence – including significant recent studies in *Cancer Prevention* and the *Journal of Clinical Oncology* – links low D3 (cholecalciferol) with breast cancer. Restoring this nutrient remains an important preventive strategy to safeguard breast health. An evaluation of blood levels of 25-hydroxyvitamin D remains the most reliable indicator of vitamin D status. In his ground breaking book *The Vitamin D Solution. A Three-Step Strategy To Cure Our Most Common Health Problem*, pioneering researcher Michael F. Holick PhD, MD advocates maintaining a blood level of 25-hydroxyvitamin D of at least 100–150nmol/L. Holick's research reveals women who are deficient at the time of diagnosis are nearly 75 percent more

likely to succumb to the disease than women with sufficient levels.

**Iodine:** Global variations in risk leads to speculation dietary factors may play a role. The observed low occurrence of breast cancer among Japanese women consuming a traditional diet is attributed mainly to a high intake of dietary iodine. Japanese women who emigrate from Japan or adopt a Western diet lose this protective advantage. A decrease in iodine leads to an increased sensitivity of breast tissue to the negative effects of oestrogen.

**Household cleaners:** A new retrospective study published in *Environmental Health* has reported household cleaning products and air fresheners contribute to increased breast cancer risk. The chemicals used in household cleaners and air fresheners are known or suspected carcinogens. In addition, significant cumulative exposure may result from products designed to provide intermittent bursts of aroma in the home and also from fabric fresheners that are designed to be sprayed directly onto furniture.



## Need more info?

### Breast Cancer Action:

<http://bcaction.org>

### Environmental Working Group:

<http://www.ewg.org>

### Our Stolen Future:

<http://www.ourstolenfuture.org/index.htm>

### Silent Spring Institute:

<http://www.silentspring.org>

### Think Before You Pink:

<http://thinkbeforeyoupink.org>



LOUISE O'CONNOR is a leading Australian naturopath who writes and educates on women's natural health. Louise swears by a fresh organic diet and yoga to keep her healthy. Visit her at [www.natural-weightloss-programs.com](http://www.natural-weightloss-programs.com).