



"Primary Care Naturally"

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Breast Health Awareness

By Dr. Olivia Franks, ND, CTT

You may have already heard October is breast cancer awareness month. Pink-everything is showing up in stores to help raise funds for breast cancer research! Some of this research has brought to light useful natural treatments, which improve breast health and/or lower breast cancer risk. These studies have guided my breast health treatment for patients over the past 4 years. This is a topic that I could write pages about – but for now here are some of the highlights from my knowledge base.

Did you know that thermography is an adjunctive breast cancer screening tool now offered at Snohomish Naturopathic Clinic? It is radiation and pain free and has the benefit of showing abnormality before a mammogram would. I have used this FDA-approved screening tool with hundreds of women. It has proved itself to be of great use in prevention.

But what I really want to talk about are my favorite supplements that have shown benefit to breast health: iodine, green tea extract, vitamin D, and DIM. Using these compounds and several others I have seen countless women improve scores on their follow-up breast thermography images. In simpler terms, there are less heat patterns on the breast thermogram, which equates to lower risk of breast cancer.

Iodine commonly thought of solely as a thyroid support mineral also has breast-support properties. Deficiency of iodine is associated with fibrocystic breast disease, ovarian and endometrial cancers (and low thyroid function). It is a mainstay in my treatment to improve breast health. Most importantly women with lumpy tender breasts, commonly called fibrocystic breasts, notice relief very quickly. The tissue becomes smoother and less lumpy and breast tenderness is usually gone!

Research on cellular activity in the breast has also shown that iodine helps abnormal breast cells induce normal cell death – an important way of preventing abnormal or cancerous tissues growth. My only caution with iodine is that too much can aggravate the thyroid in some sensitive people. I usually use low doses, but testing every month or two months is prudent. Iodine levels can be tested through a urine sample. A functional and 'almost free' way to assess iodine status is to spread some on your skin. If the brown 'stain' is gone in less than 8 hrs you have iodine deficiency of some degree.

Iodine is more beneficial to breast health than iodide. For that reason I usually have women use Lugol's iodine - available by prescription - topically to the breast tissue, although we do also carry oral iodine and sometimes use that.

My next favorite substance is **green tea extract**. Green tea contains a compound with a long name – epigallocatechin-3-gallate – otherwise known as EGCG. EGCG, like iodine, also helps to induce cell death of abnormal cells, as well block cancer cell growth and prevent new blood vessel formation from feeding tumors. The health effects of green tea are demonstrated by the Okinawan population, whose green tea consumption ranges from 8-12 cups a day. Okinawans have a much lower risk of breast, ovarian and prostate cancer – 80% less than Americans! They also have much, much lower rates of heart disease and are known to live well into their 90's!

Part of the longevity and low cancer rates of the Okinawan lifestyle is their plant-based diet. A great resource to read more on how this benefits health is the China Study by T. Collin Campbell. The movie adaptation is found on Netflix by the name Forks Over Knives. I highly recommend either watching the movie or reading the book. Having more vegetarian meals, free from animal protein (without dairy, eggs and meats) in your weekly diet has an abundance of positive health benefits.

Vitamin D has been in the news a lot of the past few years. It is known to prevent breast, prostate and colon cancers. More recent data has found that it prevents *all cancers*. Studies on mice have shown that tumors shrink in the presence of vitamin D! Vitamin D levels are easily tested by a non-fasting blood test. This is a test I recommend for all of my patients.

Diindolylmethane, otherwise known as **DIM**, is a compound found in cruciferous vegetables like broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, kale, collards and bok-choy. DIM promotes healthy estrogen metabolism, which directly affects breast health. And like green tea and iodine, it promotes abnormal cell death; vitamin D does this just as well as the drug Tamoxifen, a drug given to women with breast cancer that comes with some nasty side-effects such as endometrial cancer and osteoporosis.

Speaking of estrogen – making sure that female hormones (estrogen and progesterone) are in balance is an important part of breast cancer prevention.

The most important lesson I have learned from my work with women concerned with breast health is that we don't have to just wait around and hope our mammogram doesn't pick up cancer every year. **We can actually be proactive and do something to improve our breast health.** It's all well and good to read that a compound can be beneficial, but after seeing client after client improve her breast health, I am convinced that these compounds have tremendous benefit – they actually work!