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Women's Health Advisor®

Helping Women Over 40 Make Informed Health Decisions™

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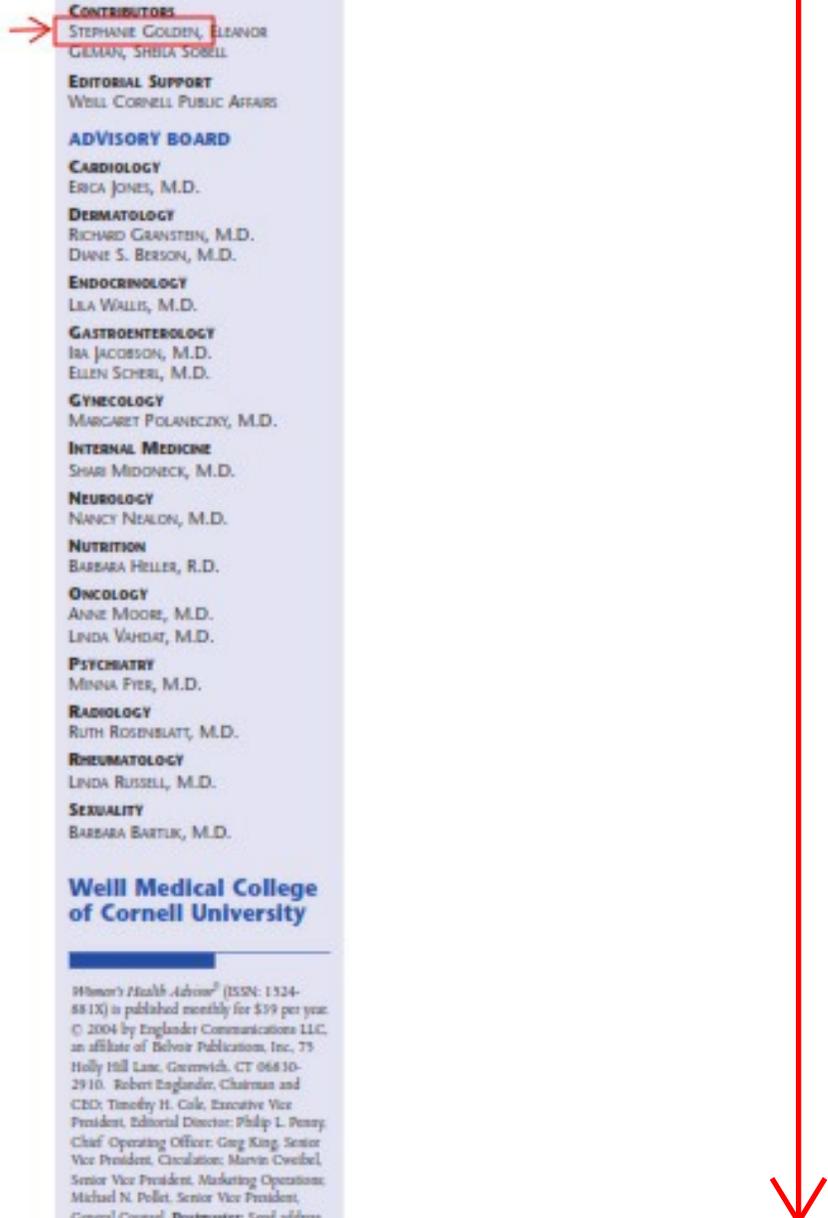
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Breast Cancer Prevention

Alternative approaches that combine Eastern and Western medicine could reduce breast cancer risk

Every day, you take preventive actions—brushing your teeth, fastening your seatbelt. But can you take a similar, pro-active approach to breast cancer? Yes, says Mitchell Gaynor, MD, “all you need is knowing what to do, and knowing that it’s possible.”

That knowledge may be found in *traditional Chinese medicine (TCM)*, say Dr. Gaynor, an assistant clinical professor of medicine at the Weill Medical College of Cornell University and Nan Lu, OMD, a doctor of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and an advisor to Columbia University’s Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine Research in Women’s Health.

TCM, practiced in China for 5000 years, looks at the body holistically, explains Dr. Lu. TCM seeks to maintain a free flow of *qi (chi, or vital energy)* throughout the body, and harmonize the functioning of the major organs. According to the tenets of TCM, blockage in the flow of *qi* can lead first to minor ailments (such as indigestion), then to disordered organ function with more severe symptoms such as migraine headaches, and eventually to a serious disorder such as cancer. As Einstein discovered, says Dr. Lu, energy can turn into mass; and on the same principle, according to TCM, stagnant energy in the body can solidify into a tumor.

Such alternative views are not shared by most cancer specialists, but they are thought-provoking. Speaking at a recent patient symposium at the Iris Cantor Center for Women’s Health in New York, Dr. Gaynor and Dr. Lu outlined several factors associated with cancer that could be countered with Western and Eastern preventive approaches.

Pollution

Most people don’t realize how serious environmental pollution is, comments Dr. Gaynor. *Dioxin*, a carcinogen produced by burning hazardous waste such as tires, gets into the air, water,

and grass; then we consume it in beef and dairy. Produce is sprayed with pesticides and herbicides—including *DDT*, which is banned in the U.S. but enters the country via out-of-season produce from abroad. The chemicals act as endocrine disruptors, weak forms of estrogen that bind to estrogen receptors on cells and stimulate cancer cell growth. For this reason Dr. Gaynor advises eating organic food.

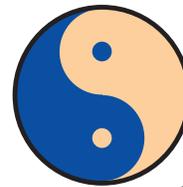
WHAT YOU CAN DO

To help avoid breast cancer:

- To avoid exposure to pollutants, eat organic foods.
- Eat more cruciferous vegetables, omega-3 fats, green tea, and garlic.
- Learn ways to reduce stress in your life; try yoga, meditation, and tai chi.

Nutrition

“Plant-based nutrients can turn off genes that lead to cancer and depress or stimulate parts of the immune system that are responsible for cancer,” Dr. Gaynor told the symposium. Some foods—including green tea, garlic, broccoli, and other cruciferous vegetables, as well as omega-3 fatty acids found in cold-water fish and flax seeds—induce the body to produce detoxifying enzymes such as *glutathione-S transferase* that protect it from environmental carcinogens. *Curcumin* (the substance that colors the spice turmeric yellow), rosemary, green tea, and red grapes also contain natural inhibitors of *cyclooxygenase-2*, an enzyme that prevents cells from dying normally and induces a cancer cell promoter, says Dr. Gaynor. Research in this area is just beginning, but he advises women to learn more about protective nutrients and eat more foods that contain them.



Dr. Lu explains that according to TCM, certain foods are considered vital to reverse another precondition of cancer: a deep

internal “cold,” which causes energy to stagnate. This “cold” condition can develop through eating cold food and drinking cold beverages. As an advocate of TCM, Dr. Lu recommends eating more “warming” foods, such as ginger, cinnamon, and fennel, and fewer raw vegetables and dairy foods.

Stress

Another factor causing “energy stagnation,” says Dr. Lu, is negative emotions stemming from traumatic life events or chronic stress. He says Western women are under tremendous stress because of the multiple roles our society demands from them. “The liver is the organ that controls the whole body’s energy flow, and stress can cause liver function disorder,” comments Dr. Lu. He believes it’s vital for women to counter the effects of stress. He’s a major advocate of meditation, be it simply taking a couple of minutes to sit still, quiet your mind, and reconnect with your heart or intuitive knowledge. “Many religions teach you to listen to the heart, not the mind. When the heart is peaceful, you can tap into your own natural healing ability,” says Dr. Lu, founding director of the Traditional Chinese Medicine World Foundation.

There have been a number of scientific studies on whether stress may contribute to breast cancer, but the results are inconclusive. However, Dr. Gaynor points out that stress suppresses the immune system. He notes that, for his patients, stress reduction is crucial in recovery. “I use breathing techniques from yoga, music, voice, and chanting to bring people to deep states of inner peace and relaxation” that help release negative emotions.

Drs. Gaynor and Lu emphasized that women can learn to take charge of their own healing, and that they don’t have to choose between conventional and alternative medicine: these modalities can often be used together. 🌀