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I would like to take this time to extend my warmest wishes and hopes for good health in the upcoming year. In such stressful economic times, the strength and perseverance of our patients has allowed me to keep my perspective. I have grown through the experience of providing care and guidance, and feel humbled by your confidence in allowing my participation in your patients care.

Rick Brown

Caffeine Consumption Shown Not To Increase Overall Breast Cancer Risk

A woman's risk of breast cancer is not increased by consuming caffeine, concludes a report published in the October 13 issue of Archives of Internal Medicine. The report, however, also found that caffeine and coffee consumption is slightly linked to breast cancer in women with benign breast disease.

Contained in coffee, tea, chocolate and some medications, caffeine is most likely the most frequently consumed drug in the world. A relationship between caffeine and breast complications was established when women with non-cancerous breast disease removed caffeine from their diets and were subsequently relieved from their symptoms. That finding led researchers to hypothesize that caffeine may increase the risk of breast cancer.

Ken Ishitani, M.D., Ph.D. (Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School, Boston, and Tokyo Women's Medical University, Japan) and colleagues analyzed a sample of 38,432 women who were aged 45 years or older between 1992 and 1995. The researchers collected dietary information and followed the women over a ten year period (on average). During this time, 1,188 of the women developed invasive breast cancer.

The key finding was that, "consumption of caffeine and caffeinated beverages and foods was not statistically significantly associated with overall risk of breast cancer". The researchers also noted that among women with benign breast disease, there was a non-significant positive association between breast cancer risk and being in the highest fifth (quintile) of caffeine consumption. This subgroup of women also had a positive and significant relationship between breast cancer and being in the highest category of coffee consumption—4 cups or more a day.

Ishitani and colleagues also found a relationship between consuming caffeine and estrogen receptor-negative and progesterone receptor-negative breast cancer (tumors to which the hormones estrogen and progesterone do not bind). Caffeine consumption was linked to a 68% increased risk of these types of cancer and a 79% increased risk for breast tumors larger than 2 centimeters.

When "Treatment" Goes Too Far

Recent research has shown that more women are choosing to have their healthy breast removed after being diagnosed with breast cancer. The number of double mastectomies from 1998 to 2003 more than doubled, according to one study.

But this additional surgery has little impact on long-term survival or whether the cancer will recur, says Lisa Newman, M.D., M.P.H., director of the Breast Care Clinic at the U-M Comprehensive Cancer Center.

Women are choosing to have more radical surgery than is necessary because of fear that their cancer will come back. Bilateral (double) mastectomy will decrease the possible need for future breast surgery, but it has little or no impact on the overall survival of a woman who has already been diagnosed with a single breast cancer. For women who test positive for the BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene mutations such as actress Christina Applegate opting for a double mastectomy may make sense. The risk of developing breast cancer in the other breast is 30 percent. But women without the BRCA mutation do not face a higher risk of breast cancer in the unaffected breast.

What Breast Cancer Survivors Need To Know About Osteoporosis

The Impact of Breast Cancer

The National Cancer Institute reports that 1 in 8 women in the United States (approximately 13 percent) will develop breast cancer in her lifetime. In fact, next to skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common type of cancer among U.S. women.

While the exact cause of breast cancer is not known, the risk of developing it increases with age. The risk is particularly high in women over the age of 60. Because of their age, these women are already at increased risk for osteoporosis. Given the rising incidence of breast cancer and the improvement of long-term survival rates, bone health and fracture prevention have become important health issues among breast cancer survivors.

Facts About Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a condition in which the bones become less dense and more likely to fracture. Fractures from osteoporosis can result in significant pain and disability. It is a major health threat for an estimated 44 million Americans, 68 percent of whom are women.

Risk factors for developing osteoporosis include:

- Being thin or having a small frame
- Having a family history of the disease
- For women, being postmenopausal, having an early menopause, or not having menstrual periods (amenorrhea)
- Using certain medications, such as glucocorticoids
- Not getting enough calcium
- Not getting enough physical activity
- Smoking
- Drinking too much alcohol

Osteoporosis is a silent disease that can often be prevented. However, if undetected, it can progress for many years without symptoms until a fracture occurs. It has been called "a pediatric disease with geriatric consequences" because building healthy bones in one's youth is important to help prevent osteoporosis and fractures later in life.

