

Study links breast cancer, hormones

BY JANE RILEY, THE CITIZEN DECEMBER 18, 2008

Study results given this past weekend at the San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium confirmed that taking menopause hormones for five years or more doubles the risk for breast cancer. While this may come as news to some readers, this information, and similar information has been known for at least 15 years.

While I was still in London, working in Pathology, I chaired an international forum with guest speakers involved with various fields of study throughout North America.

One researcher was working on timing of breast surgery with respect to menses.

She had found through her research that women with breast cancer having surgery during the first part of their monthly cycle when the estrogen levels are highest, had a far greater risk of recurring cancer than those having surgery in the second half of their cycle when estrogen is low.

I quit Pathology in London in 1994. Not news. The distressing thing is how many family physicians ask their female patients when their last cycle was -- except as a precursor to prescribing estrogen replacement therapy for menopause symptoms? Estrogen encourages cancer cells to proliferate.

The evidence produced at the San Antonio Conference demonstrated that women who took estrogen and progestin pills for even only a few years had a greater likelihood of developing cancer than those who never did. It is also clear that the recent drop in breast cancer rates is due to the decreasing numbers of women taking menopausal hormones and those who have never taken them.

As the researchers plotted their findings over time, they saw retrospectively, that the hormone users started out with twice the risk of developing breast cancer, and it fell as use of the pills declined. In the general population, use of hormone products has dropped 70 per cent since the Woman's Health Initiative Study of 2002 when researchers showed disturbingly higher risks for heart disease and breast cancer problems in hormone replacement users. Before this study, women were being encouraged to take estrogen to protect their hearts! The debate since the 2002 study then became, whether these results applied to women in their 50s or only to those in their 60s, as most of the women in the federal study were in their 60s. I wonder if the researchers developed a scale of 50 to 55 years and 55 to 60. Good grief!

Clearly, people should be made very aware of any and all likely side effects, possible side effects, and potential side effects and should be in no way coerced into taking prescription drugs for anything that is not immediately life threatening. The pro and cons of each medication should be recognized.

People think that a "side effect" is not as important as a main effect. They are all effects. The "side

effects" are just not the one's you are taking the pill for. They are just as powerful in their action.

Menopause, although it can be somewhat uncomfortable at times and even embarrassing, is not life threatening. In many cultures throughout the world it is celebrated as a female rite of passage. It is liberating, because finally at last, one is past the child bearing years!

We, unfortunately run far too easily to the doctor and to the drug store to dull pains and numb awareness.

By eating healthily, exercising strategically, and taking care to supplement our diets with vitamins and minerals that work, we alleviate much of the pain and stiffness that we believe can only be masked by pills. Cancer and a toxic body are high prices to pay for that. Instead of choosing to go down the path of ill and pills, chose health.

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