



Review Article

Stress and Breast Cancer

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Introduction

The world wide incidents of breast cancer in young patients show an obvious upward trend in recent years. Breast cancer is having the highest rate among the gynaecological cancers in India. It is reported that every 4 minutes, an Indian woman is diagnosed with breast cancer both in rural and urban India without age limit. Women in their early 30s are now at considerable risk of breast cancer and the risk peaks in their 50s and 60s. Research shows that one in 28 women is likely to develop breast cancer and it is more in urban women is likely to develop breast cancer , the effected group is the urban women than rural groups when its compared. The recent studies indicate that 50% of all cases is in the age group of 25 to 50. The late detection leads to the low survival rate in India is very significant.

Risk Factors

The common risk factors that cause breast cancer are:

- The hormonal stimulation of breast cells in the age group of 25 to 50, the occurrence increases the age and peaks at menopause.
- Gene mutations, the hereditary factor is contributing 10 to 20 % of reported cases.
- The usage of hormonal contraception containing oestrogen leads to cancer.
- Having the first child birth in advanced age and lack of breast feeding.
- Having late night work schedule increases the risk if there is no physical activity.
- Non vegetarian diet high on animal fat, alcohol conception and tobacco usage.
- High fat deposits and obesity.

Role of stress

The stress does not directly increase cancer risk but it can be harder for some people otherwise healthy in physical and psychological aspects. Studies indicate a positive correlation between a history of stressful events and increased risk of breast cancer. Stress can speed up the spread of cancer through out the body , especially in breast and ovarian cancer. When the body becomes stressed, neurotransmitters released can stimulate cancer cells by reducing immunity.

How it affects?

We have to understand the short term or acute stress and the long term or chronic stress then only we can analyse the effect of stress on breast cancer. The long term or chronic stress is triggered by situations that lasts

many weeks or months with no definite end point. This type of no end in sight stress can weaken our immune system, making it prone to diseases like cancer. It also increases the risk for digestive disorders and depression. Chronic stress causes growth and spread of tumour cells in many ways. Stress hormones inhibit the process of anoikis known to increase certain growth factors in our blood supply to kill diseased cells and prevent it from spreading. When the process of anoikis is stunted during chronic stress phase, growth of cancerous cells accelerates on the other side.

Importance of self-care

Stress can be caused by a range of life events, from the loss of a loved one, divorce, stressful work environment, financial issues, personal injury, relationship issues and more. Never underestimate the importance of adequate sleep and appropriate diet in healthy living. The physical and psychological stress and strain can cause hormonal imbalances and level of stress hormones in the body will lower our immunity quotient. Having eight hours of sound sleep is a great defence against stress. A full night sleep is essential for proper immune function that will boost up our mood, memory and focus. Regular practice of meditation or yoga helps the brain to soften the complexities of our thoughts and emotions that triggers these stress hormones causing unhealthy biological changes.

If we feel tired than usual or don't have the energy we once had or are sleeping poorly, these could be signs of stress. Take immediate steps to address the problem before it affects the health in more ways, than one.

It is important to understand the negative consequences of stress especially when it comes to cancer risks. If only we realise the connection between the physiological and the psychological, we could realign ourselves to manage our stress triggers to achieve mind body wellbeing.



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