

# Staying Abreast

With so much buzz out there on breast cancer—from new research to the latest prevention tactics—sometimes it can be hard to separate fact from fiction.

*By Yi-Hwa Hanna*

By now, most of us know enough about breast cancer to take on the basics: Carry out regular self-exams, don't smoke, stay fit, eat healthy, and stay aware of your risk level by looking into your family's medical history. But with so much ongoing research leading to a barrage of regular reports claiming to be the latest in prevention, it can be hard to know which advice to follow. We help you break down some of the most noisemaking recent findings...

**THE BUZZ:**

**Wearing bras regularly can increase your risk of developing breast cancer.**

While this may sound like an old wives' tale, the theory behind this admonition was that the wearing of bras—particularly those with an underwire—could, potentially, slow down your lymph circulation and drainage, thereby hampering the natural removal of waste and toxins from the body...which can trigger or encourage the growth of cancerous tumours. More of the myth: the earlier you start wearing bras, the higher your risk.

**THE REALITY: Supporting your girls is totally safe, and in the risk factor, bras were a scapegoat.**

A new study published in *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention* found that there's no correlation between bra-wearing and an increased risk of cancer—regardless of cup size, underwire, and how long you've been wearing a bra (both on a daily basis and in your lifetime). Researchers suspect that the original myth came about because a study done in 1991 found that

women who didn't wear bras had a lower risk of breast cancer—but neglected to associate that with the fact that slimmer women with smaller breasts were more likely to go braless, and that it's actually obesity that increases our risk of developing cancer... so the reason why the bra-wearing women were linked to higher breast cancer risk was actually due to the association with the issues that come from being overweight.

**YOUR MOVE: Don't burn your bras just yet.**

Rock the support that you need—just make sure you're wearing the right size, since ill-fitting or overly constrictive bras can lead to stress on your bones, skin and muscles and skin irritation, not to mention a fair amount of discomfort. K-Lynn Lingerie, Marks & Spencer, Passionata and Chantelle stores all offer excellent bra-fitting services, and having an expert help you find the right size can not only ensure comfort but help you wear your clothes better—looking slimmer and with a perkier-looking set—too.

**THE BUZZ:**

**Getting a double mastectomy as a preventative measure can help reduce your risk of breast cancer if you are found to carry mutations in the BRCA1 or BRCA2 genes.**

Ever since Angelina Jolie made headlines with a public declaration of her decision to undergo a preventative double mastectomy operation in May 2013, women the world over with an extremely high risk of developing breast cancer (owed in large part to their genetic history) have followed suit by having one, too.

**THE REALITY: It can help reduce risk—but only if you really need it.**

While a study published in the *British Medical Journal* found that women with BRCA-related breast cancer who have



a double mastectomy are almost 50 percent less likely to die of it than those who have a single mastectomy, research from the University of Michigan Comprehensive Cancer Center has found that about 70 percent of women who do opt for it don't actually need it. Experts claim that a diagnosis of breast cancer in one breast does not increase the likelihood of breast cancer recurring in the other breast for most women, raising the question of potential overtreatment among some patients, as well as for those opting for the aggressive surgery as a preventative measure regardless of the risk level found after gene testing.

**YOUR MOVE: First things first—see your doctor.**

Get tested for the BRCA mutation genes, and find out what percentage of risk you have when it comes to your chances of developing breast cancer. Taking a look at your family history of breast cancer, if you haven't already, is also always a good idea. If you do find that you carry the gene and that your risk is high, discuss it thoroughly with your doctor before opting for an operation as aggressive as a preventative double mastectomy, bearing in mind the emotional and mental burden that can come with it. While so far, results show that it can genuinely benefit and help prevent risk of the disease, research is ongoing into how much difference it can actually make to the majority of women going

under the knife, or how many women who opt for the procedure actually need it.

**THE BUZZ:**

**Women with certain body shapes—particularly apple shapes—have a higher risk of developing breast and other cancers.**

A number of studies have found that having a larger waist circumference can increase our risk of developing postmenopausal breast cancer, leading to suggestions that body shapes with larger midsections are at a higher risk for the disease.

**THE REALITY: It's not actually your shape, but your BMI, that can affect your risk level.**

While previous findings had led to this theory, newer studies published in *Cancer Causes, and Control* have found that the correlation is more to do with our BMI than our body shape. Higher levels of abdominal fat or abdominal obesity are attributed to the increased risk, rather than the shape of our bodies, with researchers now clarifying that it's not what shape you are, but rather what shape you're in, that can affect your risk level.

**YOUR MOVE: Watch your waistline.**

Being obese or overweight is a known risk factor when it comes to breast cancer, particularly in postmenopausal women (not to mention a whole host of other



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## Healthy Dose



health issues). Thankfully, however, it's also one of the most modifiable factors. Especially considering the risk factors for various diseases linked to high levels of abdominal, or visceral, fat, eating healthy, staying fit, and watching your waistline is always a good idea.

**THE BUZZ:** **Triclosan, a chemical antibacterial and antifungal agent often found in products from soaps and toothpastes to detergents, spurs the growth of breast cancer cells.**

While research into the matter is still ongoing, scientists have found that the ingredient may promote the growth of human breast cancer cells.

**THE REALITY:** **While some manufacturers claim they're safe, many are starting to phase these ingredients out—and for good reason.**

According to a study published in *Chemical Research in Toxicology*, both triclosan and another substance used in commercial products such as paints and plastics called octylphenol were found to promote the growth of human breast cancer cells in lab dishes and breast cancer tumours in mice. Both ingredients are EDCs (Endocrine-Disrupting Chemicals)—compounds that act like hormones—that can reportedly, when used in high doses, interfere with genes involving breast cancer cell growth and increase the amount of cancer cells. In the study, the mice that were exposed to both substances had larger and denser breast

cancer cells than those who weren't, and while the doses were considerably high, the researchers stated that this was to simulate the effects of accumulation from daily or long-term exposure.

**YOUR MOVE:** **Go natural where possible.**

The jury is still out on just how much these ingredients can bolster the growth of cancer cells, but evidence so far strongly suggests that it can significantly increase our risk. The use of both triclosan and octylphenol as antimicrobial agents remains a controversial topic thanks to the continual studies into their potential effects on organisms and environmental health.

Considering they're also used in items like tyres, rubber products, fire retardant materials and detergents, it looks like steering clear of or reducing the use of these where possible until further information is found is wise. Reading ingredient labels is always prudent, so you can stay on top of what you're exposing your body to.

**THE BUZZ:** **An olive oil-rich diet—such as a Mediterranean diet—can help reduce your risk of cancer.**

Studies on the effects of extra virgin olive oil as well as diets rich in the oil, such as the Mediterranean diet, on breast

cancer have found that it can help reduce breast cancer risk. Loaded with phytonutrients, some of which are said to inhibit tumour growth, olive oil is also high in mono-unsaturated fats, which don't oxidise in the body, thereby not producing free radicals that increase cancer risk. Just don't cook with it on high heat.

**THE REALITY:** **Extra virgin olive oil's high antioxidant levels fight cancer-promoting free radicals.**

Researchers from the Department of Cell Biology, Physiology and Immunology at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona found that when compared to a diet rich in corn



*Eat wisely to reduce your risk.*

oil, diets rich in EVOO display weaker risks of the promotion of breast cancer growth, lower tumour aggressiveness and an overall favourable effect on decreasing risk of developing the disease. More research published in the European Journal of Clinical Nutrition found that the high levels of antioxidants, including squalene and oleic acid, help to scavenge cell-damaging free radicals, in turn helping to reduce cancer risk.

**YOUR MOVE: Splash on the EVOO, baby!**

With various studies finding that extra virgin olive oil has positive effects on our risk for everything from cancer to heart disease, blood pressure, diabetes and strokes, it's clear why it's a dietary staple for many. A Mediterranean diet—which features plenty of fresh vegetables, omega-3s, healthy fats and grilled fish—is healthy and inexpensive, and high quality extra virgin olive oil is a delicious and easy way to add an extra health kick to your salads. ■



## Getting Involved

Contribute to a good cause and help raise awareness with these great regional initiatives...

**> Hayatt:** Each year "Hayatt," a part of the Ruqayah Abdulwahab Alqatami Breast Cancer Foundation, launches a Breast Cancer Drive in October. Their mission? To work with renowned oncologists and key figures in the region to help raise awareness, helping women in Kuwait understand the importance of early detection. According to Dr. Labiba Temmim, Hayatt and the Foundation's Executive Director & Medical Affairs, the number of new cancer cases has more than doubled for both men and women in Kuwait in the past 30 years. To get involved, the Foundation is collecting

donations to help cover treatment for those who cannot afford it, as well as hosting a charity dinner at the Sheraton Kuwait (a partner of Hayatt), which will be hosted by famous singers. All proceeds go to the treatment of expat breast cancer patients, and to reinforce the importance of early detection. To learn more, visit their website at [www.hayatt.org](http://www.hayatt.org).

**> Think Pink:** On October 17th and 18th, Jumeirah Zabeel Saray's Talise Ottoman Spa will be decked out in pink decorations as the spa donates all proceeds from those dates to charity. If the timings don't work for you, throughout the

month every purchase of their Rose Bliss Body Massage treatment will see a donation made to charity as well. Call 04 453 0456.

**> Pink is Punk Run:Swim:** For the fourth year in a row, Ignite Fitness & Wellness is hosting the Pink is Punk Run:Swim event to raise funds for the Safe and Sound Breast Cancer Awareness Program. The event will be hosted at Anantara The Palm Resort and Spa on October 10th starting at 6am; entry fees are Dhs150 for adults, Dhs250 for teams and Dhs50 for juniors, with spectators welcome to attend with a Dhs150 contribution. To register for the event, visit [www.premieronline.com](http://www.premieronline.com).

**> Lash Loving:** A common side-effect of chemotherapy, many cancer patients report permanent changes in their

eyelashes following the hair loss that can come along with treatment. The lash-thickening and lengthening growth serum Revitalash was inspired by this very problem, and a Limited Edition Pink Ribbon edition will be available at De La Mer Day Spa throughout the month of October. Part of the proceeds from each sale of the product will go towards non-profit breast cancer research and education initiatives; contact the De La Mer Day Spa at 04 328 2775.

**> Stretch it Out:** Inspired by one of their clients—a three-time survivor of breast cancer who believes that Pilates and yoga are some of the best forms of recovery and exercise for survivors, particularly after reconstruction—Club Stretch is launching a heartfelt fundraising initiative. Every Friday at

11am the studio will offer a Bikram Yoga class and a Pilates class at both of their studios, Al Mina and Dubai Marina, where clients will be asked to make a donation in lieu of a class fee. All of the proceeds will be donated to Brest Friends, a locally-based breast cancer support group. Club Stretch will also be launching a range of other fundraising initiatives during the month. To find out more, visit their website at [www.clubstretch.ae](http://www.clubstretch.ae) or contact them at 04 431 1758.

**> Precision In Pink:** A new limited-edition slant tweezer designed by tweezing gurus Tweezerman—featuring pink and white ribbons—will be sold across the Middle East, with a percentage of proceeds being donated to charity to help increase awareness. Available at Boots, N.Bar, Salam and Bloomingdale's.