

*Published: Thursday, November 29, 2007*

## **Report Links Increased Cancer Risk to CT Scans**

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Millions of Americans, especially children, are needlessly getting dangerous radiation from “super X-rays” that raise the risk of cancer and are increasingly used to diagnose medical problems, a new report warns. In a few decades, as many as 2 percent of cancers in the United States may be due to radiation from CT scans given now, according to the report.

The risk from a single CT, or computed tomography, scan to an individual is small. But “we are very concerned about the built-up public health risk over a long period of time,” said Eric J. Hall, who wrote the report with David J. Brenner, a fellow Columbia University medical physicist.

It was published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* today, and the study was paid for by federal grants. Some experts say that estimate is overly alarming. But they agree with the need to curb these tests particularly in children, who are more susceptible to radiation and more likely to develop cancer from it.

“There are some serious concerns about the methodology used,” but the authors “have brought to attention some real serious potential public health issues,” said Dr. Arl Van Moore Jr., chairman of the American College of Radiology’s board of chancellors.

The average American’s total radiation exposure has nearly doubled since 1980, largely because of CT scans. About 62 million scans were done in the United States last year, up from three million in 1980. More than four million were in children.

Since previous studies suggest that a third of diagnostic tests are unnecessary, that means that 20 million adults and more than one million children having CT scans are needlessly being put at risk, the authors write.

Last modified: November 29, 2007 12:00AM



- The Institute of Medicine is finally acknowledging the toxic effects of mammogram radiation as a significant factor in the development of breast cancer; just one mammogram can expose you to the radiation equivalent of 1,000 chest x-rays
- Mammograms also carry an unacceptably high rate of false positives—up to six percent—which can lead to repeat screenings that expose you to even more radiation, as well as unnecessary medical procedures, including biopsies, surgery, and chemotherapy
- A new study in the British Medical Journal highlights losses in quality of life related to the high rates of false positives and unnecessary treatment associated with breast cancer screening
- Mammograms have been scientifically proven not to save women's lives, and do not improve breast cancer survival rates over annual physical examination alone
- Your immune system is your greatest weapon against breast cancer; research now shows that 30 percent of breast tumors go away on their own, because a healthy immune system is so adept at eradicating cancer
- According to the National Breast Cancer Foundation, 200,000 new cases of breast cancer will be diagnosed each year in the US, making it three times more common than other gynecological cancers.

Breast cancer will claim the lives of 40,000 people this year.

In fact, the only type of cancer that claims the lives of more women is lung cancer.

Even more disturbing is the speed at which breast cancer rates have risen over the past 5 decades.

In 1960, one in 20 women was diagnosed—but today, it is one in seven

The following are some important facts about this type of cancer:

- Breast cancer is the leading cause of death for women age 40 to 55.
- 15 percent of all breast cancers occur in women under age 45; in this age group, breast cancers are more aggressive and have lower recovery rates.
- About 80 percent of women diagnosed with breast cancer have no family history of breast cancer.
- The toxic effects of mammogram radiation are finally being acknowledged as a significant factor in the development of breast cancer. Several recent studies have clearly shown that breast cancer screenings may be causing women more harm than good.

A new study published in the *British Medical Journal* (December 2011) confirmed that breast cancer screening may cause women harm, especially during the early years after they start screening.<sup>2</sup> This harm is largely due to surgeries, such as lumpectomies and mastectomies, and other (often unnecessary) interventions. The study highlights losses in quality of life from false positive results and unnecessary treatment.

Fortunately, we're beginning to see the initial stirrings of change, as this latest report from the Institute of Medicine (IOM) shows, which calls into question the role environmental exposure may be playing in the development of breast cancer.<sup>3</sup> The IOM committee is absolutely correct in calling for more research into the risks of various environmental exposures over the course of a woman's lifetime. Isn't it ironic that the mammogram—the principle diagnostic test given to women to help detect and prevent breast cancer—is responsible for increasing women's risk for developing it?

### **Mammogram Radiation is Much More Damaging than a Chest X-Ray**

Mammograms use ionizing radiation at a relatively high dose, which can contribute to the mutations that can lead to breast cancer. You can get as much radiation from one mammogram as you would from 1,000 chest X-rays. Mammography also compresses your breasts tightly, which can lead to a dangerous spread of cancerous cells, should they exist. Dr. Samuel Epstein, one of the world's top cancer experts, has stated:

*"The premenopausal breast is highly sensitive to radiation, each 1 rad exposure increasing breast cancer risk by about 1 percent, with a cumulative 10 percent increased risk for each breast over a decade's screening."*

### **Breast Cancer Screening May Lead to Unnecessary Treatments and Surgeries that Can Actually SHORTEN Your Lifespan**

Another concern is that mammograms carry an unacceptably high rate of false positives—up to six percent. False positives can lead to expensive repeat screenings, exposing you to even more radiation, and can sometimes result in unnecessary invasive procedures such as biopsies, surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy. In fact, if you undergo breast screenings, you have a 35 percent increased risk of having surgery.<sup>4</sup> If a mammogram detects an abnormal spot in your breast, the next step is typically a biopsy.

This involves taking a small amount of tissue from your breast, which is then looked at by a pathologist under a microscope to determine if cancer is present. These biopsies are notoriously inaccurate, often leading to misdiagnosis and unnecessary treatments, not to mention undue emotional stress.

Just thinking you may have breast cancer, when you really do not, focuses your mind on fear and disease, and the stress is actually enough to trigger an illness. It is well established that stress has damaging effects on your health. So, a false positive diagnosis can be damaging to your health from multiple angles. In a 2009 Cochrane Database Systematic Review of breast cancer screening and mammography, the authors wrote:<sup>5</sup>

*"Screening led to 30 percent overdiagnosis and overtreatment, or an absolute risk increase of 0.5 percent. This means that for every 2000 women screened for 10 years, one will have her life prolonged, and 10 healthy women who would not have been diagnosed if they had not been screened, will be treated unnecessarily."*

Unfortunately, the disturbing scientific findings do not end there. This means that by having these breast cancer screenings, you may be *shortening your life*, rather than extending it. In reference to the 2011 *BMJ* findings about the damage being done by breast cancer screening, Sayer Ji of Green Med Info wrote:<sup>5</sup>

*"What is perhaps most disturbing about these findings is that, while they clearly call into question the safety and effectiveness of breast screenings, the studies upon which they are based use an outdated radiation risk model, which minimizes by a factor of 4 to 5 the carcinogenicity ... What this indicates, therefore, is that breast screenings are not just 'causing more harm than good,' but are planting seeds of radiation-induced cancer within the breasts of millions of women."*

Some of the other research-based breast cancer fighters include the following:

- Eating plenty of fresh, whole, organic vegetables, especially fermented vegetables
- Avoiding all processed foods, and minimizing sugar, grains and starchy foods
- Vitamin A plays a role in preventing breast cancer; your best sources are organic egg yolks, raw milk and butter, and beef and chicken liver (from organically raised, grass pastured animals)
- Curcumin (the active agent in turmeric) is one of the most potent tumor-inhibiting foods; black cohosh, artemisinin, green tea, kelp, cruciferous vegetables and evening primrose oil also show promise in helping to prevent breast cancer
- Getting plenty of exercise daily

#### References:

- <sup>1</sup> About Breast Cancer, [The Breast Cancer Site](#).
- <sup>2</sup> Possible Net Harms of Breast Cancer Screening: Updated Modelling of Forrest Report, [British Medical Journal](#), December 8, 2011: 343; d7627, James Raftery and Maria Chorozioglou.
- <sup>3</sup> Breast Cancer and the Environment: A Life Course Approach, [Institute of Medicine of the National Academies](#), December 7, 2011.
- <sup>4</sup> Confirmed: Breast Screenings Cause More Harm Than Good, [GreenMedInfo.com](#), January 5, 2012: Sayer Ji.
- <sup>5</sup> X-ray Mammography: For Every Woman Whose Life is Prolonged 10 Women's Lives will be Shortened, i.e. "Treated Unnecessarily", [Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews](#), October 7, 2009: 2009(4); CD001877, Peter C. Gøtzsche and Margrethe Nielsen.
- <sup>6</sup> Confirmed: Breast Screenings Cause More Harm Than Good, [GreenMedInfo.com](#), January 5, 2012: Sayer Ji.
- <sup>7</sup> Effect of Screening Mammography on Breast-Cancer Mortality in Norway, [New England Journal of Medicine](#), September 23, 2010: 363(13); 1203-10, Mette Kalager, MD, et al.
- <sup>8</sup> Effect of Screening Mammography on Breast-Cancer Mortality in Norway, [New England Journal of Medicine](#), September 23, 2010: 363(13); 1203-10, Mette Kalager, MD, et al.
- <sup>9</sup> Regression of Low-grade Squamous Intra-epithelial Lesions in Young Women, [The Lancet](#), November 6, 2004: 364(9446); 1678-1683, Anna-Barbara Moscicki, M.D., et al.
- <sup>10</sup> Cancers Can Vanish Without Treatment, but How?, [The New York Times](#), October 26, 2009: Gina Kolata.
- <sup>11</sup> Could This Be The End of Cancer?, [Newsweek](#), December 12, 2011: Sharon Begley.
- <sup>12</sup> Cancers Can Vanish Without Treatment, but How?, [The New York Times](#), October 27, 2009: Gina Kolata