

You can lower your risk of breast cancer

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For any girl, the development of breasts is a keen indicator that one is a woman in waiting. And because it is a sign that a girl is maturing into adolescence, they will admire and do all sorts of things to keep them in good shape.

However, breasts can be deadly once they develop any abnormality and change their shape to become painful with chronic diseases such as cancer. Sadly, the terminal disease also

attacks men.

Breast cancer has been defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as a disease in which abnormal cells divide. Worse still, the WHO estimates that breast cancer is the top cancer in both women in developed and under developed countries, due to the increased life expectancy, urbanisation and adoption of western lifestyle.

About 1.7 million women are diagnosed with breast cancer worldwide per year. In Uganda alone, the Uganda Cancer Institute (UCI) es-

timates that breast cancer is the second most prevalent at 45 per 100,000 women after cervical cancer which has just surpassed it. Of the breast cancer patients, 80 per cent die shortly after diagnosis due to late presentation.

Prof Henry Wabinga, the manager, Kampala Cancer Registry, an institution that monitors and regulates cancer treatment programmes in the country, says the annual rise in breast cancer incidences currently stands at six per cent. "This means that in about 20 years, the incidence of breast cancer is likely to overtake

cervical cancer which currently stands at 50 per 100,000 of population," Prof Wabinga.

However, low cost screening such as clinical breast examination are utilised in limited resource settings. Therefore, as the saying goes, desperate times call for desperate measures, October being a breast cancer month, doctors have advised that all other factors considered constant, there are measures one can take to prevent or lower breast cancer risk.

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Government organs should embark on sensitising citizens on the right foods to eat, which clothes and merchandise not to use and all the basic measures to undertake. Cancer strikes in different, actually all ways of life.

BRIAN MUREL, MURUMBUZA, PUBLIC RELATIONS SPECIALIST

Government must invest more finances in laboratories to facilitate early detection, improve health foods security, and waive taxes on agro-processes to facilitate healthy eating.

MOSES TALIBITA, LECTURER

Government needs to put up a number of accessible clinics across the country where Ugandans can go for routine checkups just like it is with HIV/Aids.

SUZANNE EDITH SEBUBIRA, JOURNALIST

Breast cancer prevention: How to reduce the risk

Although there is no sure way to prevent breast cancer, there are things you can do that may lower your likelihood of getting it, whether you have a family history or not.

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Breast feeding
Dr Fred Okuku, an oncologist at UCI, says breast feeding is an exclusive measure towards preventing the risk of breast cancer.

For the case of breast cancer in particular, Dr Okuku cautions women who do not want to breast feed that they stand higher chances of getting breast cancer compared to those who breast feed.

"Since cancers are triggered by hormones, breast feeding helps to keep the hormones at bay and since it takes long for a breast feeding woman to get pregnant again, the hormones are kept working," Dr Okuku says.

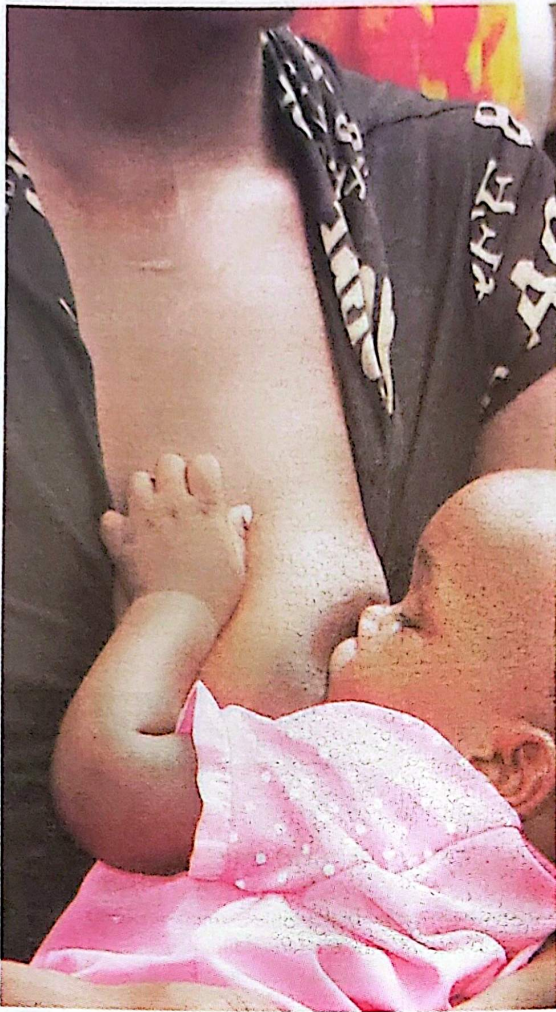
Avoid birth control pills, particularly after 35

According to siteman.wustl.edu, an online portal, birth control pills have both risks and benefits. The younger a woman is, the lower the risks are. While women are taking birth control pills, they have a slightly increased risk of breast cancer. This risk goes away quickly, though, after stopping the pill. The risk of stroke and heart attack is also increased while on the pill - particularly if a woman smokes. However, long-term use can also have important benefits, such as lowering the risk of ovarian cancer, colon cancer and uterine cancer - not to mention unwanted pregnancy - so there is also a lot in its favour. If you are very concerned about breast cancer, avoiding birth control pills is one option to lower risk.

Eat healthy

In both males and females, Dr Okuku says avoiding lifestyles such as diets rich in fats, smoking, alcohol and red meat helps one to prevent cancer cells and subsequently breast cancer and all its negative side effects including death.

"The science is simple: when one accumulates a lot of weight [due



During pregnancy and breastfeeding, you shed breast tissue. This shedding can help remove cells with potential DNA damage, thus helping to reduce your chances of developing breast cancer. PHOTOS BY RACHEL MABALA

to fatty foods] they create a lot of fats. Some fats can create hormones which become food for the cancers," Dr Okuku says, adding: "With avoidance of such foods on one's diet, such hormones are kept away which reduces one's chances of getting cancer."

Reduce weight

Because physical exercise has been found helpful in reducing weight

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PERCENTAGE OF CANCER CASES THAT ARE PREVENTABLE ACCORDING TO WHO

IS THERE A LINK BETWEEN BIRTH CONTROL PILLS AND BREAST CANCER?

A number of older studies suggested that birth control pills - which often had higher estrogen doses prior to 1985 - slightly increased the risk of breast cancer, especially among younger women. In these studies, however, 10 years after discontinuing birth control pills women's risk of breast cancer returned to the same level as that of women who never used oral contraceptives. Current evidence does not sup-

port an increase in breast cancer with today's birth control pills.

What else can I do?

Be vigilant about breast cancer detection. If you notice any changes in your breasts, such as a new lump or skin changes, consult your doctor. Also, ask your doctor when to begin mammograms and other screenings based on your personal history.



There are concerns that because birth control pills use hormones to block pregnancy they may overstimulate breast cells, which can increase the risk of breast cancer. NET PHOTO.

and fats in the body, Dr Vincent Karuhanga, a general physician at polyclinic in Kampala, says this is essential in the prevention of non-communicable diseases, cancer inclusive. "It is said that one should do physical exercises at least three times a week for at least 30 minutes to get good results," Dr Karuhanga advises.

Detox

Wilson Kirabira, a nutritionist, points out that some environmental toxins - such as cigarette smoke - some metals, and high-oxygen atmospheres pave way for the cancer cells to thrive and therefore one needs antioxidant chemicals to neutralise them.

"These are found in vegetables such as carrots, broccoli, and mushrooms. Fruits such as apples, avocado, chili pepper, soursop (ekitaferi) as well as herbs and spices such as garlic, rosemary, and seeds and nuts are good ways to get rid of toxins from the body," Mr Kirabira says.

Avoid hair dye

A study from the Finnish Cancer Registry has indicated that there is

a link between women who use hair dye and likelihood of developing breast cancer. "We did observe a statistical association between hair dye use and risk of breast cancer in our study," Sanna Heikkinen one of the researchers said.

Heikkinen, however, cautions that scientists are yet to confirm the cause-effect relationship. As such, the measures would relieve one from exorbitant cost of cancer treatment in the country which would require a patient to part with at least Shs700,000 per week for chemotherapy.

However, despite the available options to prevent breast cancer risks, Dr Okuku warns that other factors such as family history where one carries the genes from their parents makes prevention difficult. "I would not scare many but the family risk makes one more vulnerable and someone with that should be alert and go for regular screening," Dr Okuku notes.

He also clarifies that bras worn by women have nothing to do with causing breast cancer because cancerous cells are not triggered by the physical things you put on but rather by internal occurrences.