

Western diet risk to Asian women

Asian women who eat a Western-style diet high in meat, white bread, milk and puddings may be at higher risk of breast cancer, research has suggested.

A study of 1,500 Chinese women showed those who ate a "meat-sweet" diet were twice as likely to develop the disease as those on a vegetable-based diet.

Asian breast cancer rates are lower than those in the West but are rising.

The study in Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers and Prevention suggested increasing obesity rates may be key.

The two-fold increase in risk for women on a Western-style diet was found to exist only among post-menopausal overweight women.

Those with a Body Mass Index (BMI) of over 25 were found to be most at risk.

"For post-menopausal women, low consumption of a western dietary pattern plus successful weight control may protect against breast cancer in a traditionally low risk Asian population that is poised to more broadly adopt food characteristics of western societies," researchers from the Fox Chase Cancer Center wrote.

Milk and sugar

The "meat-sweet" diet researchers identified included various meats and fish as well as sweets, puddings, white bread and milk.

A "vegetable-soy" diet more traditionally followed in China comprised a variety of vegetables, soy-based products and freshwater fish.

According to the Chinese Anti-Cancer Association (CACA) the incidence and death rates of breast cancer in China's major cities rose respectively by 37% and 38.9% during the 1990s.

Better diagnosis is believed to partly explain the rise, but environmental factors - including dietary changes - are also thought to be key.

In the West, scientists have estimated that obesity causes around 10% of breast cancer cases.

Over a hundred studies show that post-menopausal women who are overweight or obese have a raised risk of breast cancer.

But Breakthrough Breast Cancer said it was still very difficult to tease out the various factors, and that the study did not appear to take into account issues such as having children at a later age, not exercising or taking the pill.

"Overall it is hard to determine the effects of diet on breast cancer risk," said Dr Sarah Cant, Senior Policy Officer at the charity.

"We still aren't sure which specific dietary factors influence the chance of developing the disease."

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