

# Breast Health and Chinese Medicine

Breast cancer is the second most commonly diagnosed cancer in women. One in eight women will be affected by the disease and early detection is key. **Monthly breast self-exams should be performed to detect changes in breast tissue.** Women over the age of 40, or those that are at high risk for developing diseased breasts, should have yearly mammograms. In Chinese and Western medicine, diseases in their early stages are easier to treat.

**Stress is a risk factor** for breast disease. Many of us live very stressful lives that leave the body susceptible to illness. Stress reduction and mind-body techniques may help to decrease the risk and prevalence of breast disease. **Meditation, qigong, acupuncture and exercise have been shown to help alleviate stress and may influence breast health.**

From a Chinese Medicine perspective, breast cancer, fibroids, mastitis and diseases of breast tissue are related to **qi\*** movement in the body. Depression, anxiety, anger and worry may lead to disruptions of qi flow and transformation. As qi becomes stagnant or slows down, accumulations build up and in some cases lead to fibroids, cancer or mastitis.

Environmentally, there are many causes of disease. Pesticides used in agriculture, additives to preserve foods, and artificial hormones used to ease symptoms of menopause have widely been tied to the development of unhealthy breast tissue.

According to the Women's Health Initiative Study, women who used hormone replacement therapy to treat symptoms of menopause showed an increase in occurrence of breast cancer. Reducing exposure to pesticides and food additives decreases the chemical load in the body and lessens the risk of developing breast related diseases.

According to the American Cancer Society, while **eating organic foods and a mainly plant-based diet can reduce your risk**, exercise is always important: studies show people who keep their Body Mass Index (BMI) within a healthy range reduce their risk of developing breast cancer by 50 percent. Research indicates that a healthy plant-based diet and at least **30 minutes of vigorous exercise each day** can help you stay within a healthy weight range and on the path to preventing breast disease.

**Chinese herbal medicine, acupuncture and mind-body techniques are also safe and natural complements to other risk-reducing strategies.**

## Drink to Your Health

A popular and nutritious breast health recipe is a **green smoothie**. Place all of the following into a blender or juicer:

- Mixture of organic and seasonal greens such as kale, parsley and lettuce.
- Mixture of seeds such as flax, pumpkin or sunflower.
- Add other veggies or fruits to taste such as ginger, carrots, bananas, apples, etc.
- Add sources of omega oils 3, 6 and 9 such as olive oil or flax oil.

Cover with filtered water. Blend and enjoy!



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\***Qi** (pronounced chee) is an East Asian term whose meaning changes with context. In medicine, qi can mean breath, a substance which flows through the acupuncture meridians, or the vital movements necessary and present in every living system.