

An environmental disease?

A new campaign is demanding that the impact of chemical pollutants on breast cancer rates is fully investigated

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100,000 man-made chemicals pollute our environment, more than 500 are hormone disrupting

Breast cancer cases have hit a new record, official figures show and the increase shows no sign of slowing. Latest government results reveal that the incidence has risen 80% since 1971, and breast cancer is now the commonest cancer in the UK and by far the most common cancer in women.

The new No More Breast Cancer Campaign is demanding action to halt the rise and to improve the primary prevention of the disease. Women's lifetime risk of breast cancer has until recently been estimated at one in nine but by now may be higher.

Breast cancer causes more than 12,400 deaths each year in the UK. Although mortality in the last 10 years has gone down, breast cancer incidence in industrialised countries – among all age groups – has been rising steadily for decades. Even though government statistics record five-year survival rates, they underestimate the toll from the disease because it can return, sometimes 20 or more years after the first diagnosis.

Published data do not indicate, either, how many patients have to undergo mastectomy to survive. The physical, psychological, social and economic impacts of breast cancer on women, their families and friends, are increasing, as are the costs to the NHS.

Fewer than 50% of breast cancer cases can be attributed to officially recognised 'established' and 'probable' risk factors, which are understood to increase a woman's susceptibility to breast cancer, for example, age, diet or late-age pregnancy.

A substantial number of animal, human,

laboratory and field studies dating from the 1930s provide significant evidence for the role of man-made environmental agents, including chemicals and pesticides, in breast cancer:

- Of around 100,000 man-made chemicals polluting our environment, more than 500 – in pesticides, plastics and detergents, for example – are hormone disrupting. Breast cancer is a hormonally-dependent disease

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- Over 400 man-made chemicals are commonly found in human blood and body tissues. Carcinogens and hormone-disrupting chemicals are included in this toxic burden
- Combinations of these chemicals may produce a 'chemical cocktail' effect in our bodies, which regulatory authorities have only just started to investigate.

Women are unaware that, even if they do not personally have the known 'risk factors', they still remain at risk because these harmful environmental toxins have not so far been tackled strategically.

The No More Breast Cancer Campaign argues that these pollutants can be reduced, modified or eliminated from the environment altogether.

What we want

The No More Breast Cancer campaign is demanding that the government:

- Acknowledges that 'lifestyle' factors (such as smoking and diet) cannot fully account for the alarming rise in breast cancer incidence
- Informs the public clearly about the increasing numbers of diagnoses and mastectomies
- Prioritises primary prevention, not just early detection, of the disease
- Includes a strategic plan to reduce our exposure to environmental pollutants in public health policy as a precautionary measure
- Introduces a national programme to find out exactly which chemical pollutants are in breast tissue and breast milk (while supporting breastfeeding), and monitors their health effects
- Funds research into the long-term health outcomes for people who take measures to minimise their own chemical exposures, by for example eating an organic diet
- Implements legal protection for women and children from bodily contamination with pollutants, with affordable legal redress.

Get involved...

For more information on breast cancer and the No More Breast Cancer Campaign:
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