

Cell phone-cancer link found by Tel Aviv University scientist

February 14 2008

An Israeli scientist, Dr. Siegal Sadetzki, has found a link between cell phone usage and the development of tumors.

Dr. Sadetzki, a physician, epidemiologist and lecturer at Tel Aviv University, published the results of a study recently in the *American Journal of Epidemiology*, in which she and her colleagues found that heavy cell phone users were subject to a higher risk of benign and malignant tumors of the salivary gland.

Those who used a cell phone heavily on the side of the head where the tumor developed were found to have an increased risk of about 50% for developing a tumor of the main salivary gland (parotid), compared to those who did not use cell phones.

The fact that the study was done on an Israeli population is significant. Says Sadetzki, “Unlike people in other countries, Israelis were quick to adopt cell phone technology and have continued to be exceptionally heavy users. Therefore, the amount of exposure to radiofrequency radiation found in this study has been higher than in previous cell phone studies.

“This unique population has given us an indication that cell phone use is associated with cancer,” adds Sadetzki, whose study investigated nearly 500 people who had been diagnosed with benign and malignant tumors of the salivary gland.

Controlled Study Reveals Link

The study's subjects were asked to detail their cell phone use patterns in terms of how frequently they used one, and the average length of calls. They were compared to a sample of about 1,300 healthy control subjects.

The study also found an increased risk of cancer for heavy users who lived in rural areas. Due to fewer antennas, cell phones in rural areas need to emit more radiation to communicate effectively.

Sadetzki predicts that, over time, the greatest effects will be found in heavy users and children.

While anecdotal evidence has been substantial, the consistency of the results of this study support an association between cell phone use and these tumors. The risks have been hard to prove, mainly due to the long latency period involved in cancer development, explains Sadetzki.

Keep Calling but Call Smarter

Today it is estimated that more than 90% percent of the Western world uses cell phones. As the technology becomes cheaper and more accessible, its usage by a greater number of people, including children, is bound to increase.

“While I think this technology is here to stay,” Sadetzki says, “I believe precautions should be taken in order to diminish the exposure and lower the risk for health hazards.” She recommends that people use hands-free devices at all times, and when talking, hold the phone away from one's body. Less frequent calls, shorter in duration, should also have some preventative effect.

While she appreciates the ease of communication that cell phones allow between parents and their children, Sadetzki says that parents need to consider at what age their children start using them. Parents should be vigilant about their children's using speakers or hands-free devices, and about limiting the number of calls and amount of time their children spend on the phone.

“Some technology that we use today carries a risk. The question is not if we use it, but how we use it,” concludes Sadetzki.

Sadetzki's main research on this new study was carried out at the Gertner Institute for Epidemiology and Health Policy Research at the Sheba Medical Center. Her research is part of the international Interphone Study, which attempts to determine an association between cell phones and several types of brain and parotid gland tumors.

Source: American Friends of Tel Aviv University

Citation: Cell phone-cancer link found by Tel Aviv University scientist (2008, February 14) retrieved 18 April 2024 from

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