

Diabetes may double cancer risk in women

June 10 2010

Type 2 adult-onset diabetes causes insulin-like hormones to circulate through the body. A new study finds this has a surprisingly positive effect on reducing the rate of prostate cancer in men, but is bad news for women: Type 2 diabetes may double the risk of female genital and other cancers.

The new study, led by Dr. Gabriel Chodick and Dr. Varda Shalev of Tel Aviv University's Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine at the Sackler Faculty of Medicine, is not the first to report such a risk. But it's one of the largest to confirm these findings, and it's the first to determine the statistical differences in cancer risks for men and women.

Recently published in the journal *Cancer Causes & Control*, the Tel Aviv University study looked at 16,721 diabetics, differentiating between men and women and defining the relative cancer risks for each group. When the study began in 2000, none of the subjects had a history of cancer. Over the following eight years, the researchers documented 1,639 cases of different cancers among people with diabetes, and compared them to occurrences of the same cancers in the healthy non-diabetic population - a sample of 83,874 people.

Good news for men, bad news for women

"For men, this study is good news," says Dr. Chodick. The study demonstrates that diabetes actually appears to have a preventative effect on conditions like prostate cancer, reducing the risk of cancers associated with insulin-like hormones by a whopping 47 percent. But the

opposite is true for women, he continues. "The interaction of diabetes and female hormones appears to exaggerate the risk, and make certain organs like the uterus and ovaries more receptive to certain kinds of cancer."

While the news is something for female diabetics and their practitioners to take into consideration, there's no cause for panic, Dr. Chodick notes. Although colon and ovarian cancers are serious, their overall risk in women is generally quite low. However, he stresses that physicians should take the research into account when assessing the long-term health histories of their patients.

An ounce of prevention still the best medicine

Dr. Chodick encourages diabetic women to be screened for colon [cancer](#) earlier and more often than those in the general population. As the occurrence of diabetes in America rises, primarily brought on by an unhealthy lifestyle, such screenings can save lives.

[Type 2 diabetes](#), which is characterized by high blood glucose and an [insulin](#) deficiency, normally occurs in adulthood, and it can often be managed with a healthy diet, exercise, and oral medications. It affects more than 10% of all women in America over the age of 20, according to the American Diabetes Association.

Of course, wherever possible, the best approach is to avoid [diabetes](#) entirely, says Dr. Chodick, with the help of a high-fiber, low-carbohydrate diet combined with exercise.

Provided by Tel Aviv University

Citation: Diabetes may double cancer risk in women (2010, June 10) retrieved 17 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-06-diabetes-cancer-women.html>

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