

At-risk women and their doctors have low awareness of preventive meds

April 21 2021



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A Peter Mac-led study has shown many Australian women at increased risk of breast cancer are unaware they can reduce their risk with medication.

More than 720 women and 220 of their clinicians responded to a survey assessing awareness of preventive medications, such as tamoxifen, that can reduce breast cancer risk.

These drugs are off-patent and so are not a focus of pharmaceutical companies when it comes to medications they support with patient and clinician awareness campaigns.

The surveyed women were all part of the ongoing [kConFab](#) study of families with strong history of breast and ovarian cancer.

Just ten (1.4%) of the women had ever taken preventive medication and half (52%) were unaware this was available—along with 3% of breast surgeons and 35% of family doctors.

Among those who were aware, concern about [side-effects](#) (31%) and inadequate information (23%) were the main reasons women did not take preventive [medication](#).

Dr. Courtney Macdonald said for family doctors surveyed, the main barrier was insufficient knowledge about these medicines.

"When taken preventively, tamoxifen is generally well-tolerated and side-effects tend to be overestimated by women and doctors," she also said.

An [online tool](#)—[iPrevent](#)—is available to help [women](#) and clinicians understand if preventive medications are appropriate and provide clear information on side-effects and benefits.

Dr. Macdonald is lead author of a paper reporting these findings, published in the journal *Cancer Prevention Research* and with an accompanying editorial.

More information: Victor G. Vogel. Implementation of Risk-reducing Strategies for Breast Cancer is Long Overdue, *Cancer Prevention Research* (2020). [DOI: 10.1158/1940-6207.CAPR-20-0556](https://doi.org/10.1158/1940-6207.CAPR-20-0556)

Provided by Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre

Citation: At-risk women and their doctors have low awareness of preventive meds (2021, April 21) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-04-at-risk-women-doctors-awareness-meds.html>

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