Survivors of breast cancer face increased risk of heart disease

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Thanks to advanced medical treatments, women diagnosed with breast cancer today will likely survive the disease. However, some treatment options put these women at greater risk for a number of other health problems. A new study out of Brazil shows that postmenopausal women with breast cancer are at greater risk for developing heart disease. Results are published online in *Menopause*, the journal of The North American Menopause Society (NAMS).

Cardiovascular disease remains the main cause of death in postmenopausal women, and women treated for breast cancer are at greater risk of developing heart disease than those not diagnosed with breast cancer. These cardiovascular effects may occur more than 5 years after radiation exposure, with the risk persisting for up to 30 years.

The goal of the new study was to compare and evaluate risk factors for cardiovascular disease in postmenopausal women who are survivors of breast cancer and women without breast cancer. The researchers found that postmenopausal women who are survivors of breast cancer showed a markedly stronger association with metabolic syndrome, diabetes, atherosclerosis, hypertriglyceridemia, and abdominal obesity, which are major risk factors for cardiovascular disease. The risk of cardiovascular mortality similarly increased to match death rates from the cancer itself.

Findings were published in the article "High risk for cardiovascular disease in postmenopausal breast cancer survivors."

"Heart disease appears more commonly in women treated for breast cancer because of the toxicities of chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and use of aromatase inhibitors, which lower estrogen. Heart-healthy lifestyle modifications will decrease both the risk of recurrent breast cancer and the risk of developing heart disease," says Dr. JoAnn Pinkerton, NAMS executive director. "Women should schedule a cardiology consultation when breast cancer is diagnosed and continue with ongoing follow-up after cancer treatments are completed."

Provided by The North American Menopause Society

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