

preventing breast cancer

By Vera Tweed

As a very successful plastic surgeon, Christine Horner, MD, performed her share of breast reconstruction surgeries on cancer survivors. But in 1994, she began to re-evaluate her goals. That year, her mother died of breast cancer. At the same time, patients she saw who needed breast reconstruction were getting younger—more of them were in their 20s—and insurance didn't necessarily cover the procedure.

So Horner started a campaign that resulted in a legal mandate for insurance to cover the surgery, and began researching nutrition and lifestyle methods of preventing breast cancer. "I was on the clean-up crew," she recalls, and she was determined to help women prevent the disease.

TOP PREVENTION STRATEGIES

"The thing that has more of an influence than genetics, diet, smoking, and everything else is being in loving, supportive relationships," says Horner. But nutrition, exercise, and sleep habits are other key factors.

Simply changing your sleep schedule—going to bed at 10 p.m. and getting up at 6 a.m.—can reduce your risk for breast cancer by as much as 50 percent, she says. That schedule results in the maximum natural production of melatonin, which significantly helps to prevent the disease. If you're used to turning in later, Horner recommends going to bed 15 minutes earlier than usual for a week, then shifting your bedtime back by another 15 minutes the second week, and so on.

She also recommends eating a plant-based diet that's high in omega-3 fatty acids from flax seeds, as well as protective supplements. Caffeinated coffee, if it agrees with you, is also very beneficial. And, get regular exercise.

WHERE TO START

"Do just one healthy thing," she says, such as taking supplements, and that one change can halve your risk for breast cancer. Her top supplement choices are AHCC, a patented mushroom extract proven to reduce cancer risk (500 mg twice daily), flax seed oil (1–2 tablespoons daily), vitamin D (2,000 IU daily), green tea extract (500 mg daily of an extract with 45 percent EGCG), and turmeric (1 gram daily). In addition, for women with a BRCA1 gene mutation, she highly recommends taking 200 mcg daily of selenium.

"We have the vast majority of the influences under our control," says Horner, and taking supplements is the easiest place to start.



**CHRISTINE HORNER, MD:
CANCER FIGHTER**

Christine Horner, MD, is dedicated to educating women and health professionals about breast cancer prevention, safe screening methods, and effective treatments. A former plastic surgeon, she is the author of *Waking the Warrior Goddess: Dr. Christine Horner's Program to Protect Against & Fight Breast Cancer*. Nearly 20 years ago, she began a national crusade for health insurance to cover breast reconstruction surgery after a mastectomy. As a result of her campaign, the Breast Reconstruction Advocacy Project, a federal law, was passed in 1998, requiring insurance companies to pay for breast reconstruction, and 35 states then passed similar laws.