Obesity Might Interfere with Certain Breast Cancer Treatments

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Obese and overweight female breast cancer patients mayrequire treatment options that take into account the higher levels of thehormone estrogen found in their bodies, according to a study published in theJournal of Clinical Oncology and reported by HealthDay News.

For the study, researchers at the Breakthrough Breast CancerResearch Centre at the Institute of Cancer Research in London looked at 54postmenopausal women with a type of breast cancer known as estrogenreceptor-positive breast cancer. (More than three quarters of all breastcancers require estrogen to grow, so blocking the production of this hormone isone of the main ways to treat breast cancer.)

In addition, scientists compared the body-mass index, orBMI, a measure based on height-to-weight ratio, of all women in the study. (ABMI of 30 is considered obese.)

Researchers found that obese breast cancer patients hadhigher levels of estrogen than women of normal weight, meaning they had aharder time fighting breast cancer. In fact, scientists found that women with aBMI of 30 to 35 had levels of estrogen that were about three times higher than levelsin women with a BMI less than 25.

After they were treated with hormone-suppressing drugs, the estrogenlevels in obese women dropped. But their estrogen levels still remained doublethat of women with normal BMIs.

However, researchers said women shouldn't worry about theseresults. "Women with higher BMIs should certainly not be alarmed by thisfinding or stop taking their treatment," said Mitch Dowsett, PhD, a professorof biochemical endocrinology at Chester Beatty Laboratories, in London, andsenior study author. "Our study only takes us a step closer to understandingwhich of the treatment options available might be the most suitable forindividual women."

About one in eight women (just under 12 percent) willdevelop invasive breast cancer over the course of their lifetime, and African-Americanwomen are not immune. In fact, though white women are slightly more likely todevelop breast cancer overall, the condition is more common in black women youngerthan 45 than their white counterparts. What's more, African-American women aremore likely to die of breast cancer than any other ethnic group.

But there is good news. Did you know exercise can lower youroverall breast cancer risk? Click here to learn more.

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