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Obesity and Vitamin D Deficiency May Indicate Greater Risk for Breast Cancer

New study demonstrates that postmenopausal women have an increased risk of vitamin D deficiency at the time of breast cancer diagnosis, associated with a higher rate of obesity

CLEVELAND, Ohio (September 19, 2018)—Vitamin D is already well known for its benefits in building healthy bones. A new study supports the idea that it also may reduce cancer risk as well as breast cancer mortality, especially in women with a lower body mass index. Study results are published online today in *Menopause*, the journal of The North American Menopause Society (NAMS).

Breast cancer remains the most common cancer in women worldwide and is the leading cause of death from cancer in women. Reproductive risk factors such as early onset of puberty, late menopause, later age at first pregnancy, never having been pregnant, obesity, and a family history have all been shown to be associated with breast cancer development. The role of vitamin D concentration in the development of breast cancer, however, continues to be debated.

This study involving more than 600 Brazilian women suggests that vitamin D may reduce cancer risk by inhibiting cell proliferation. Study results appear in the article “Low pretreatment serum concentration of vitamin D at breast cancer diagnosis in postmenopausal women.”

Researchers involved in the study concluded that postmenopausal women had an increased risk of vitamin D deficiency at the time of their breast cancer diagnoses, associated with higher rates of obesity, than women of the same age group without cancer. Similar studies also have previously demonstrated a relationship between vitamin D and breast cancer mortality. Women in the highest quartile of vitamin D concentrations, in fact, had a 50% lower death rate from breast cancer than those in the lower quartile, suggesting that vitamin D levels should be restored to a normal range in all women with breast cancer.

“Although published literature is inconsistent about the benefits of vitamin D levels and breast cancer, this study and others suggest that higher levels of vitamin D in the body are associated with lowered breast cancer risk,” says Dr. JoAnn Pinkerton, executive director of NAMS. “Vitamin D may play a role in controlling breast cancer cells or stopping them from growing. Vitamin D comes from direct sunlight exposure, vitamin D₃ supplements, or foods rich in vitamin D.”

For more information about menopause and healthy aging, visit www.menopause.org.

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Founded in 1989, The North American Menopause Society (NAMS) is North America’s leading nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the health and quality of life of all women during midlife and beyond through an understanding of menopause and healthy aging. Its multidisciplinary membership of 2,000 leaders in the field—including clinical and basic science experts from medicine, nursing, sociology, psychology, nutrition, anthropology, epidemiology, pharmacy, and education—makes NAMS uniquely qualified to serve as the definitive resource for health professionals and the public for accurate, unbiased information about menopause and healthy aging. To learn more about NAMS, visit www.menopause.org.