



HRT LINK TO REDUCED RISK OF GUT CANCERS OVERSHADOWED BY BREAST CANCER RISK

Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) could reduce a woman's risk of food pipe, stomach and bowel cancers, although the breast cancer risk still outweighs the positive effects, Cancer Research UK-funded scientists have discovered.

The research*, presented this week at the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Cancer Conference in Liverpool, showed that the risk for all three cancers – which make up the majority of gut cancers – was reduced by 20 to 30 per cent in women taking HRT compared with those who were not.**

But scientists warned that on balance the protective role of HRT for gastrointestinal cancers was far outweighed by the drug increasing the risk of breast cancer - the most common cancer in women in the UK.

The study showed that there was one less case of gastrointestinal cancer for every 2000 women aged 50-64 using HRT for five years compared to those who did not use the drug during the same period. Over the same time, in the same number of women, there would be an estimated 20 extra cases of breast cancer with HRT use.

Lead researcher Dr Jane Green, based at Cancer Research UK's epidemiology unit at the University of Oxford, said: "Our results are interesting in showing what effect HRT can have on cancers along the length of the gut. However, the reduced risk of gastrointestinal cancers needs to be seen in the wider context of other risks and benefits. Overall, cancer risk is increased in women who take HRT."

The reduction in risk of gastrointestinal cancers was the same for both oestrogen-only and combined forms of HRT.

The risk was also reduced in both existing and past users of the drug, and regardless of how long HRT was taken.

Dr Lesley Walker, director of cancer information at Cancer Research UK, said: "Studies like this are valuable in adding to existing information about how HRT affects a woman's risk of cancer. While this study finds that HRT may protect against some cancers, there is stronger evidence to show that taking the drug can do more harm than good for most women.

"There are a variety of reasons why women take HRT; those thinking of taking the drug should talk to their doctor and be aware of all the information about HRT so they can make a decision appropriate to their condition.

"Cancer Research UK's advice is that women should only take HRT for medical reasons and for as short a time as possible."

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For media enquiries please contact Angela Balakrishnan on 0151 239 6042, the NCRI press office on 020 3469 8300 or, out-of-hours, the duty press officer on 07050 264 059.

Notes to Editors:

*Green, J – Hormone replacement therapy, oral bisphosphonates and risk of gastrointestinal cancer, 2010 (<http://www.ncri.org.uk/ncriconference/2010abstracts/abstracts/LB20.htm>)

**Previous studies have shown that HRT can reduce the risk of bowel cancer, the most frequent type of gastrointestinal cancer and the second most common form of cancer among women in the UK.

But evidence for the drug's impact on the rarer food pipe (oesophageal) and stomach cancers has been largely inconclusive.

About the NCRI Cancer Conference

The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Cancer Conference is the UK's major forum for showcasing the best British and international cancer research. The Conference offers unique opportunities for networking and sharing knowledge by bringing together world leading experts from all cancer research disciplines. The seventh annual NCRI Cancer Conference is taking place from the 6-9 November 2011 at the BT Convention Centre in Liverpool. For more information visit www.ncri.org.uk/ncriconference

About the NCRI

The National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) was established in April 2001. It is a UK-wide partnership between the government, charity and industry which promotes co-operation in cancer research among the 21 member organisations for the benefit of patients, the public and the scientific community. For more information visit www.ncri.org.uk

NCRI members are: the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI); Association for International Cancer Research; Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council; Breakthrough Breast Cancer; Breast Cancer Campaign; Cancer Research UK; CHILDREN with LEUKAEMIA, Department of Health (England); Economic and Social Research Council; Leukaemia and Lymphoma Research; Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research; Macmillan Cancer Support; Marie Curie Cancer Care; Medical Research Council; Northern Ireland Health and Social Care (Research & Development Office); Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation; Scottish Government Health Directorates (Chief Scientist Office); Tenovus; Welsh Assembly Government (Wales Office of Research and Development for Health & Social Care); The Wellcome Trust; and Yorkshire Cancer Research.

About Cancer Research UK

- Cancer Research UK is the world's leading charity dedicated to beating cancer through research.
- The charity's groundbreaking work into the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of cancer has helped save millions of lives. This work is funded entirely by the public.
- Cancer Research UK has been at the heart of the progress that has already seen survival rates double in the last thirty years.
- Cancer Research UK supports research into all aspects of cancer through the work of more than 4,800 scientists, doctors and nurses.
- Together with its partners and supporters, Cancer Research UK's vision is to beat cancer.

For further information about Cancer Research UK's work or to find out how to support the charity, please call 020 7121 6699 or visit www.cancerresearchuk.org

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