

# Women exposed to negative life events at greater risk of breast cancer

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Happiness and optimism may play a role against breast cancer while adverse life events can increase the risk of developing the disease, according to a study by Professor Ronit Peled, at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Israel. An article on the study titled "Breast Cancer, Psychological Distress and Life Events among Young Women," was just published in the British journal *BMC Cancer* (8:245, August 2008).

In the study, researchers questioned women about their life experiences and evaluated their levels of happiness, optimism, anxiety, and depression prior to diagnosis. Researchers used this information to examine the relationship between life events, psychological distress and breast cancer among young women.

A total of 622 women between the ages of 25 and 45 were interviewed: 255 breast cancer patients and 367 healthy women. "The results showed a clear link between outlook and risk of breast cancer, with optimists 25 percent less likely to have developed the disease. Conversely, women who suffered two or more traumatic events had a 62 percent greater risk," Peled said. "Young women who have been exposed to a number of negative life events should be considered an 'at-risk' group for breast cancer and should be treated accordingly."

The researchers indicate that women were interviewed after their diagnosis, which may color their recall of their past emotional state somewhat negatively. However, according to Peled, "We can carefully say that experiencing more than one severe and/or mild to moderate life event is a risk factor for breast cancer among young women. On the other hand, a general feeling of happiness and optimism can play a protective role."

"The mechanism in which the central nervous, hormonal and immune systems interact and how behaviour and external events modulate these

three systems is not fully understood," Peled states. "The relationship between happiness and health should be examined in future studies and relevant preventative initiatives should be developed."

Source: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

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