



The Lifestyle and Culinary Medicine Newsletter



This Month's Focus: **Breast Cancer Awareness**

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women globally and affects as many as 1 in 8 women.

Every October, the world pauses to bring breast cancer into sharp focus. Pink ribbons fill our communities, but behind every symbol is a deeply human story of resilience, early detection, compassionate care, and the ongoing movement toward better health and longevity for every person we love.

Whether you are navigating a diagnosis yourself, supporting a loved one, or working to take charge of your own health, this month is a powerful reminder that knowledge and preventive care are among our strongest tools.

In this edition, we're looking past the pink noise to focus on what truly matters: practical guidance on early screening, actionable steps to protect your well-being, and meaningful ways to support the fighters, survivors, and families in our community.

With care,

Dr. Lateef

Knowledge as Medicine: Screening & Prevention

Taking control of your breast health starts with clarity—knowing when to screen and understanding how everyday choices influence long-term risk.

1. Clear Screening Guidelines

Early detection remains the single most effective tool for improving outcomes. While personal risk factors (such as family history or genetic predispositions) may require an individualized plan, current evidence-based guidelines for average-risk individuals recommend:

- **Age 40:** Start discussing screening with your care provider. Standard guidelines recommend starting mammograms every two years beginning at age 40.
- **Ages 45 to 74:** Annual screening mammograms are recommended for average-risk individuals.
- **Know Your Breast Density:** Mammograms also assess tissue density. If you have dense breasts, the sensitivity of mammograms to detect cancer decreases and cancer can be missed. Speak with your physician about whether supplemental imaging (such as ultrasound or MRI) is appropriate for you.
- **Know Your Normal:** Perform regular self-awareness checks. If you notice persistent changes, such as a new lump, skin dimpling, or changes in the nipples, schedule an evaluation promptly regardless of when your last mammogram occurred.



2. Evidence-Based Lifestyle Habits for Risk Reduction

While non-modifiable risk factors like age and genetics exist, research consistently shows that lifestyle interventions can meaningfully reduce breast cancer risk and improve overall health:

- **Prioritize Whole, Plant-Forward Nutrition:** Emphasize a diet rich in vegetables, legumes (beans, lentils, soy), intact whole grains, berries, and healthy fats. Fiber-rich plant foods aid in metabolic regulation and support natural hormone balance.
- **Maintain Regular Physical Activity:** Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise (such as brisk walking, cycling, or rowing) per week, alongside strength-building activities twice a week. Physical activity lowers circulating insulin and estrogen levels, reducing overall risk.
- **Minimize or Eliminate Alcohol:** Alcohol consumption is a well-established risk factor for breast cancer. Even low-to-moderate intake can elevate estrogen levels. Opting for non-alcoholic alternatives is a high-impact step for risk reduction.
- **Support Healthy Sleep & Stress Regulation:** Prioritize 7 to 9 hours of quality sleep nightly to foster cellular repair and metabolic regulation. Incorporating mindfulness, creative hobbies, or daily nature walks supports immune resilience.



Benefits of Physical Activity in Breast Cancer Prevention and Recurrence:

Regular physical activity is associated with a **15–23% lower breast cancer risk**.

Exercise improves quality of life, fatigue, and cardiorespiratory fitness in patients with breast cancer. Exercise is safe during and after treatment, with minimal adverse events, and should be tailored to individual needs and comorbidities. Regular activity reduces recurrence and mortality, and is an integrated part of breast cancer treatment.

Recommended exercise guidelines for breast cancer patients:

- Aerobic activity:** At least 150 minutes/week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity (e.g., brisk walking, cycling).
- Resistance training:** Two sessions (30 minutes each)/week targeting major muscle groups.
- Flexibility and balance:** Incorporate stretching and balance exercises, especially for older adults.

Mechanisms underlying exercise benefits:

- Hormonal regulation:** Exercise lowers estrogen and insulin, reducing tumor growth.
- Immune function:** Exercise enhances immune surveillance and reduces inflammation.
- Body composition:** Exercise reduces adiposity, lowering recurrence risk.



Instagram | @humairalateefmd

Lentil & Chickpea Salad with Roasted Tofu

Ingredients: Salad

- 1 can (15 oz) brown lentils, drained & rinsed
- 1 can (15 oz) chickpeas, drained & rinsed
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup Medjool dates, pitted & chopped
- 1 large cucumber, diced
- 1 small red onion, finely diced
- 1 cup feta, crumbled
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cup fresh mint, roughly chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup fresh coriander, roughly chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup walnuts roughly chopped



Ingredients: Dressing

- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup extra virgin olive oil
- Juice & zest of 1 large lemon
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- 1 garlic clove, crushed
- 1 tsp pure maple syrup
- Pinch of salt

Ingredients: Roasted Tofu

- 1 block (10 to 16 ounces [280 to 450 grams]) extra-firm tofu (do not use silken style), drained
- 1 tablespoon olive oil, optional
- 1 tablespoon low-sodium soy sauce or tamari
- 1 teaspoon honey or agave
- 1 clove garlic, minced, optional

Instructions:

1. Pressing tofu: The key to making good roasted tofu is to press out the excess water. To do this, wrap with a paper towel or clean, absorbent kitchen towel, then set on a plate and put something with at least a couple pounds of weight on top of it (I use a stock pot, large can, or another plate with something on top to weigh it down). Let sit for at least 15 minutes, and then unwrap and drain off excess water. Ideally, press for longer if you want firmer, chewier tofu.
2. While tofu is being pressed, preheat the oven to 400°F (200°C). Prepare a baking sheet with the following to prevent sticking: parchment paper, nonstick spray, or baking sheet wiped on in a thin layer oil.
3. After pressing the tofu, cut it into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch thick slices or 1-inch cubes.
4. In a shallow baking dish or mixing bowl, whisk together olive oil (optional), soy sauce, honey, and garlic. Add tofu and gently turn to coat the tofu on all sides.
5. Place tofu in a single layer on the baking sheet, making sure that no pieces are touching. Bake in the oven for 15 minutes, turn tofu over and bake another 15 minutes, or until lightly browned. (If omitting oil, it will not brown as much)
6. Place all salad ingredients into a large salad bowl. Whisk dressing ingredients together & pour over salad. Toss to combine & enjoy.

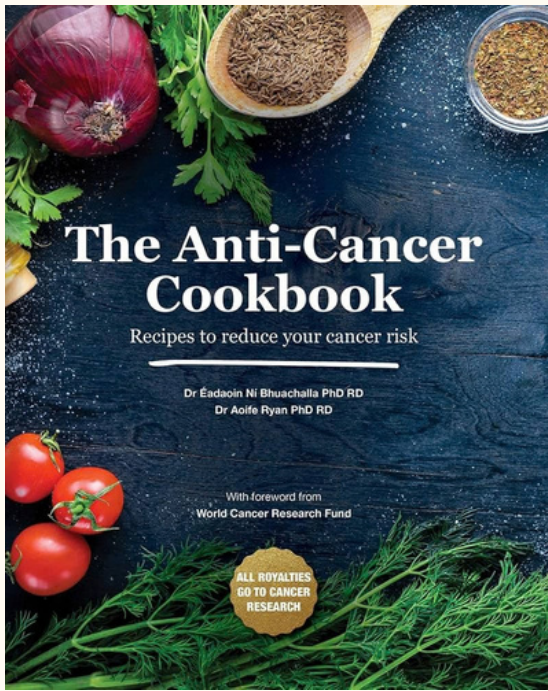
Book Suggestion

The Anti-Cancer Cookbook, Recipes to reduce your cancer risk

By

Dr. Eadaoin Ni Bhuachalla & Dr. Aoife Ryan

Food has the extraordinary ability to heal, protect, and restore. This cookbook translates science-backed cancer prevention guidelines into vibrant, everyday meals that nourish your cells and support your vitality. From anti-inflammatory soups to fiber-rich grain bowls, each dish is crafted to show that eating for optimal health can be both simple and deeply enjoyable.



Common Myths about Breast Cancer:

Here are a few persistent patient myths I have had to address time and again over the past few years.

Myth: Soy increases the risk of breast cancer and should be avoided by breast cancer survivors.

Truth: Eating soy in moderate amount, 1-2 servings per day, does not increase breast cancer risk. The clinical and epidemiological evidence supports that isoflavone found in soy benefits breast cancer patients.

Myth: The radiation from screening mammography causes breast cancer.

Truth: The radiation-induced cancer risk is real but extremely small and is vastly outweighed by the mortality benefit of early detection.

Myth: The compression of breasts during mammogram or the procedure itself "spreads" or triggers cancer.

Truth: There is no evidence for this, and it is not recognized in the scientific literature.

Breast Health Awareness Month is more than an annual observance—it is a continuous commitment to nurturing our health, supporting one another, and advocating for care. Take time this month to schedule your check-ups, reach out to a friend affected by breast cancer, or simply take a deliberate step toward your own well-being.

Wishing you good health and resilience always, enjoy reading and share how we are doing!