



Cell phones and breast cancer: Mothers must Be Aware

This month "Ask the Doctor" addresses an important but largely unrecognized health issue: cell phones and the risk of breast cancer in young women. The concern is based on my own personal observations, new scientific studies on how cell phones may alter cell metabolism, and a new public warning from the chairman of the prestigious University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute (ref. 1-5)

The bottom line is that I am convinced that there is a potential risk that cell phones that are in direct contact with the breast will increase the risk for developing a future breast cancer. The chairman of the prestigious Pittsburgh Cancer Institute, Dr. Ronald B. Herberman, issued a memo of warning to his entire staff about the potential cancer risks associated with cell phones in contact with the body. He also noted that younger individuals are at increased risk as compared to adults (ref. 2). In other words, the younger the age at exposure, the greater the future risk of getting breast cancer.

What has me so concerned is the fact that so many young girls are hiding their cell phones in their bras. This is typically done during class time in an effort to conceal them from their teachers. This behavior is considered to be the "cool thing to do."

I am concerned that if we do not act now to discourage this behavior, we will see a major increase in the incidence of breast cancers in the next 10-20 years with particularly high incidences in the 20-30 year age groups. I realize that my preaching to teens about the dangers of cell phones will not make much of an impression, so I am appealing to all mothers to take action now. Please inform your daughters of potential risks, and insist that they immediately stop placing the cell phone in direct contact with any part of the body.

I believe that it is essential to inform all mothers of this risk, but I need your help. Please forward the following link to all of your contacts. Below are links to Twitter, Facebook, and email. It is urgent that we work as a team to get the message out. Thanks in advance for your support. Also, let me know if I can be of any assistance to you in terms of spreading the word. Back ground information:

My first experience with a case in which a cell phone was suspected to have caused a breast cancer was reported in last year's "Ask the Doctor" (ref. 1) We described a case of a 39 year old woman who routinely kept her cell phone in her bra over a 7 year time period. She developed multiple small cancers which were found in the breast in a distribution that matched the shape her cell phone, and they were located just below the skin in the exact area where there was phone to skin contact.

A few months ago we saw a second case in which a cancer was found in the breast tissue directly below the spot where the phone was in direct contact with her breast. I have asked many of my colleagues if they had observed any similar cases. Several stated that the answer was affirmative, but assumed that it was just a coincidence.

The most remarkable example of this association between cell phones and breast cancer occurred in a 38 year old female with no family history of breast cancer. She worked on an assembly line testing cell phones. The phones were on a conveyor belt and passed directly under both breasts. She developed cancer in the lower aspect of both breasts after several years of work on the assembly line.

Although there is a growing body of concern that cell phones can cause cancer, there is essentially no scientific data that either confirms or refutes this concept. Recent studies do demonstrate that cell phones can cause metabolic changes in the brain, and the authors of the study conclude that more investigation is needed to determine if there are medical risks associated with the use of cell phones. (Ref 3).



Studies on use of cell phones and the risk of developing brain cancer have suggested that prolonged use of the cell phone (>10) years may be associated with an increased risk of brain cancer, but the conclusion remains controversial and more study is needed (Ref. 4-5). Also, there appears to be a growing consensus that the younger the age at exposure, the greater the long-term risk. Consensus also agrees that it will take 10 to 20years before the increase incidence in cancer will be detected.

Thus the dilemma, we have reason for concern that cell phones have a link to cancer. It will take years before we get a definitive answer. In the mean time, the use of cell phones is rapidly expanding and cell phone use is starting at a younger age. It seems only reasonable in terms of risk of breast cancer to avoid contact between the cell phone and the breast. If the breast is at risk, there is concern for other potentially vulnerable organs such as the brain, the eyes, and the testicles (ref. 4). Until we have definitive information, we must make every effort to avoid direct contact between the cell phone and the body.

I hope I have convinced my readers of the importance of this issue, and again I ask you to forward the message to all of your contacts! Your comments or suggestion would be appreciated contact us at Ask The Doctor.

References:

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3. Study reported in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), February 22, 2011:<http://pubs.ama-assn.org/media/2011j/0222.dtl#1>
4. Interview on Larry King Live: http://www.vantageoncology.com/media/west_hills/Song-CNN-cell.htm
5. John West MD, Surgical Director of Breastlink at the Breast Care and Imaging Center of Orange County www.breastcare.com