

# Make a clean breast of it

Can antiperspirants cause breast cancer? Dr Choo Wan Ling debunks eight common myths. Read on!

**Myth 1:** My grandmother and mother had breast cancer. Does this mean that I'll get breast cancer too?

**Fact:** A family history of breast cancer is only one of the risk factors for the disease. It does not mean that you are destined to develop the disease or that you have inherited a genetic risk of breast cancer. Only five to 10 per cent of all breast cancer cases are explained by an inherited genetic mutation. Some women who have inherited the mutated BRCA1 or BRCA 2 gene – putting them at a higher risk of breast cancer – will never go on to develop the disease.

**Myth 2:** There has been no case of breast cancer in my family so I don't have to worry about it.

**Fact:** Don't count on it. Most women who develop breast cancer have no family history of the disease. So even if you have no family history of breast cancer, it is important to get screened annually.

**Myth 3:** The majority of women diagnosed with breast cancer had more than one risk factor prior to diagnosis.

**Fact:** Actually, all women are at risk of developing breast cancer whether or not they have any risk factors. In fact, the majority of breast cancer patients had no risk factors. So as always, go for regular screening.

**Myth 4:** Having yearly mammograms will expose me to too much radiation and cancer will develop as a result.

**Fact:** According to the American College of Radiology, the benefits of annual mammograms far outweigh any risk involved due to the minute amount of radiation used during this screening



and diagnostic procedure.

**Myth 5:** Breastfeeding will increase my risk of getting breast cancer

**Fact:** The opposite is true! Breastfeeding may lower the risk of perimenopausal breast cancer.

**Myth 6:** Breast cancer is contagious.

**Fact:** Not in the least. You won't catch breast cancer from someone or spread it to others. It is a result of uncontrolled

cell growth in the body. So it is okay to spend time with someone who has cancer. In fact, your support would be invaluable to a patient struggling with the disease.

Of course, it must be added that though cancer is not contagious, some viruses that can lead to the development of cancer are. Two common cancers caused by viruses are cervical cancer and liver cancer. Human papillomavirus (HPV) can be transmitted through sexual contact and cause cervical cancer, while Hepatitis B, a virus transmitted through sex or infected needles, can cause liver cancer.

**Myth 7:** Antiperspirants cause breast cancer.

**Fact:** Some reports have suggested that these products contain harmful substances that can be absorbed through the skin or enter the body through nicks caused by shaving. However, according to the National Cancer Institute (NCI), there is no conclusive evidence linking the use of underarm antiperspirants or deodorants with breast cancer.

**Myth 8:** Stress causes breast cancer.

**Fact:** Stress can lead to other ailments like hypertension. However, studies have failed to show any evidence that people who tend to be anxious or stressed are any more likely to develop breast cancer than people who are relaxed. So don't stress yourself out for the wrong reasons. ♥

*This article is contributed by Dr Choo Wan Ling, consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist, Pacific Specialist Practice.*