

The Deodorant Debate

The alarm rings in the morning, and you sleepily reach over to turn it off. You climb out of bed and begin the daily routine: brush teeth...check; shower...check; get dressed...check; apply deodorant...wait. Or should you? New studies indicate that you may want to rethink this unquestionable, everyday task. Researchers are trying to determine whether there is a correlation between women who use deodorant or antiperspirants and those that are diagnosed with breast cancer, which may or may not indicate that you should think twice before applying deodorant.

According to a study published in the *Journal of Applied Toxicology*, Dr. Philippa Darbre and her colleagues at the University of Reading in the United Kingdom tested 20 human breast tumors and found that all contained parabens, or synthetic preservatives. Parabens are ingredients found in most cosmetic or personal care substances—including deodorant. Because the underarm region is located so close to the breast area, these findings might suggest that deodorant does in fact play a role in causing breast cancer.

Apparently, there are questions across the globe about deodorant's link to breast cancer. Janet Boivin, RN, published an article for *Nursing Spectrum* about a study performed by Chicago physician Kris McGrath who was determined to reach a conclusion over this debate. Boivin said McGrath's study "suggests the absorption of aluminum salts, a primary ingredient in antiperspirants, combined with frequent skin disruption caused by underarm shaving, may play a role in breast cancer." McGrath's research involved 437 women who had survived breast cancer. However, he was still unable to find a concrete relationship between deodorant, underarm shaving and breast cancer. According to Boivin, McGrath found that "women who shaved under their arms three times a week or more and applied deodorants two to five times a week or more were diagnosed with breast cancer 22 years earlier than nonusers and 12.5 years earlier than minimal users." Unfortunately, McGrath's cause and effect conclusions

are still uncertain. He admits that more research is needed in this area. For the time being, McGrath suggests using an organic or natural deodorant that does not contain the chemicals in question.

As always, there is another side to this debate. An article published in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* states that there is no proven link between the use of antiperspirants or deodorants and breast cancer. This urban legend, as some are calling it, has circulated through e-mail causing great concern among the female population, even though there is still no conclusive evidence on a cause-effect relationship. Boivin also wrote in her article that, "the US Food and Drug Administration, which regulates food, cosmetics, medicines, and medical devices, also does not have any evidence or research data to support the theory that ingredients in underarm antiperspirants or deodorants cause cancer."

We can only hope that current and future studies will help us in our fight against breast cancer. However, in a time of speculation, theories and uncertainty about what may or may not cause breast cancer, it is a personal choice as to how we will protect ourselves now and in the future.

