Migraines Yes, Breast Cancer No?

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Migraines are a serious headache, but for women who suffer from the painful condition there may be a health benefit, according to findings of a new study reported on in Health News. Researchers found that women with a history of migraines have a 26 percent reduced risk of developing breast cancer.

The study examined the data on more than 9,000 women. The finding remained consistent despite differing variables, such as menopausal status, age of first migraine diagnosis, medications used or triggers experienced.

“This research suggests that women with migraine may have a lower risk of breast cancer,” said the study’s lead author, Christopher I. Li, MD, PhD, of Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle. “If we can better understand what the biological mechanisms are, that could open new avenues for research into breast cancer prevention.”

While the scientists weren’t sure why women migraine sufferers seemed to have a decreased risk of breast cancer, they suggested that hormones—in particular estrogen—may be responsible.

“It’s pretty clear that migraine, like breast cancer, is a hormonally related disease,” said Li. “Many triggers for migraine are also things that reduce estrogen levels.”

Researchers indicate that increased estrogen levels boost the risk for breast cancer. Therefore, a decrease in the hormone’s level in women with migraines, said Li, made it “biologically plausible” for these women to be less apt to develop breast cancer.

Nevertheless, Li still recommended that women with migraines continue having breast cancer screenings and follow-up visits.

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