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BODY



may lower risk of breast cancer

A study suggests that traditional diets, particularly those including plenty of mushrooms and green tea, may explain China's lower breast cancer incidence

Mushrooms and green tea as breast cancer deterrents? A group of researchers said there just might be a case for that. They carried out a study of more than 2,000 Chinese women and found that the more fresh and dried mushrooms the women ate, the lower was their breast cancer risk. The risk was even lower among women who also drank green tea daily.

It is known that the rate of breast cancer in China is four to five times lower than rates typically seen in developed countries. However, the rate has been climbing over the past few decades in the more affluent parts of China.

The findings, reported in the International Journal Of Cancer, suggested that traditional diets – and specifically, large quantities of mushrooms and green tea – may help explain China's lower breast cancer incidence, according to the lead researcher, Dr Min Zhang, of the University of Western Australia in Perth.

The study, conducted in south-east China, involved 1,009 breast cancer patients between the ages of 20 and 87, and an equal number of healthy women of the same age. They answered a detailed questionnaire on their diets which asked how often they ate specific foods.

Dr Zhang's team found that women who ate the most fresh mushrooms – 10g or more per day – were about two-thirds less likely to develop breast cancer than those who did not eat mushrooms. Meanwhile, women who ate 4g or more of dried mushrooms per day had half the cancer risk of non-consumers.

Mushroom-eaters who also drank green tea every day had only 11 to 18 per cent

of the breast cancer risk of women who consumed neither.

The researchers pointed out that their study did not prove cause-and-effect. They accounted for several kinds of risk factors for breast cancer – such as the women's weight, education level, exercise frequency and smoking habits, but they also said that other factors could explain the findings.

Dr Zhang, who told Reuters Health that this was the first study linking high dietary amounts of mushrooms and green tea to lower breast cancer risk, said that it was too early for women to assume that the foods would help them avoid the cancer.

Previous lab research has shown that mushroom extracts have anti-tumour properties and can stimulate the immune system's cancer defences in animals. Green tea contains antioxidant compounds called polyphenols that have been shown to fight breast tumours in animals.