

# Breast cancer patients to be spared chemotherapy

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Thousands more breast cancer sufferers every year will be spared gruelling chemotherapy after a study found that it offered no benefits after surgery.

Up to 5,000 more women will avoid harsh side-effects of the treatment, including hair loss, vomiting infertility and even heart failure, as a result of the Tailorx trial. The NHS could save up to £22.5 million per year in chemotherapy costs alone.

The largest breast cancer treatment trial ever, which followed 10,000 women for nine years, has found an "intermediate group" of patients for whom post-surgery chemotherapy offers no benefits and who can be safely treated with just hormone therapies.

Alistair Ring, a consultant medical oncologist at the Royal Marsden hospital, said the results would mean a "step change" in practice and reduce the number of women in the UK given chemotherapy each year by between three and five thousand. Under a third

of women with the most common form of breast cancer will now receive chemotherapy, down from half. "As an oncologist, [today] in the clinic I will offer less chemotherapy that will not be of benefit to patients," Dr Ring said.

About 23,000 women in Britain have hormone-receptor positive, Her2-negative, node-negative breast cancer diagnosed each year and their cancer can be run through the Oncotype DX test. The test, performed on a tumour biopsy sample taken during surgery, looks at 21 genetic markers in cancers that suggest how likely they are to grow and spread. Samples are sent to a laboratory in Redwood, California, and the results are returned to oncologists within two weeks.

Women with scores of up to 10 on the test already receive hormone treatment only and those with scores above 25 require chemotherapy. For the vast majority of women with scores in the middle of the scale — more than two thirds — the evidence on post-surgery treatment was unclear and oncologists

would make a decision based on their own experience.

The trial, led by the Montefiore Medical Center in New York, assigned women with intermediate scores to receive either chemotherapy plus hormone treatment or hormone treatment alone. After about seven years of follow-up, rates of disease-free survival, cancer spread and overall survival were almost identical. Only women aged under 50 with scores between 16 and 25 appeared to benefit from chemotherapy. The results are being presented at the American Society of Clinical Oncology's annual meeting in Chicago and published simultaneously in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

● People who eat only ready-made meals could be putting themselves at greater risk of breast cancer, according to a study in Spain. Scientists found that women with an "inflammatory diet", which includes pasta, red and processed meat and high-fat dairy, were 39 per cent more likely to develop the disease than those who rarely ate such foods.

Times H.S. 18