

Drug Can Reduce Risk of Breast Cancer, Study Says

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CHICAGO — A drug now used to prevent recurrences of [breast cancer](#) can also reduce the risk of it occurring in the first place, providing a new option for women at high risk of getting the disease, researchers reported here on Saturday.

Two drugs, tamoxifen and raloxifene, are already approved to prevent breast cancer but both are rarely used for that purpose, in part because they can have serious side effects like blood clots. The researchers said the new option, exemestane, does not have those side effects and might be more acceptable.

“There’s a very safe therapy that looks highly effective in preventing breast cancer,” Dr. Paul E. Goss, professor of medicine at Harvard and Massachusetts General Hospital, said at a news conference at the annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology. He was the lead investigator in the study, which was presented at the conference and published online by the New England Journal of Medicine.

Exemestane, also known by the brand name Aromasin, is one of a class of compounds known as aromatase inhibitors. These drugs stop the production of [estrogen](#), which fuels [tumor](#) growth. They have proven superior to tamoxifen in preventing recurrence of [cancer](#) after a breast tumor is removed.

So researchers have long suspected that aromatase inhibitors would also reduce the risk of an initial occurrence of breast cancer, though this is the first big randomized study to demonstrate that.

The trial involved 4,560 post-menopausal women in the United States, Canada, France