Breast mammograms may also predict future risk for heart disease, stroke

Routine mammography—widely recommended for breast cancer screening—may also be a useful tool to identify women at risk for heart disease

New Delhi, Feb 27, 2017: Routine mammograms for breast cancer may also predict the risk for future development of heart disease, according to a study published in Obstetrics & Gynecology. Researchers reviewed data on 1,454 women who received mammograms.

They found that after five years, 20.8% who tested positive for breast arterial calcifications had developed heart disease, compared with 5.4% who showed no signs of the granular deposits, and the risk for heart disease was 6.3% compared with 2.3%, respectively. Moreover, 58.3% of the women with arterial calcification developed stroke compared with 13.5% who tested negative.

Dr K K Aggarwal, Padma Shri Awardee, National President Indian Medical Association (IMA) and President Heart Care Foundation of India (HCFI) and Dr RN Tandon – Honorary Secretary General IMA in a joint statement said that "Mammograms mainly look for calcifications which are the buildup of calcium salts. Such buildups are important because calcifications may indicate early cancer. Similar buildups are also observed in cardiovascular conditions. While looking for those potentially cancerous calcifications, radiologists may also see a different kind of calcification caused by cholesterol buildup in breast arteries. Arteries supply the breasts with nutrition the same way they supply our heart and brain. The hardening of the arteries, or atherosclerosis, can affect the arteries in the breast just the same way it can affect the heart and the brain."

“The findings are really extraordinary in the larger context. This may turn out to be a successful way of determining a woman’s risk of cardiovascular disease, with no extra money or extra radiation, at the same time she is screened for breast cancer. However, it’s important to note that mammograms alone can’t diagnose atherosclerosis; that’s best done with an invasive procedure called a coronary angiogram, or cardiac catheterization”, added Dr K K Aggarwal.

Some tips:

- Mammograms are an important screening test for women, especially those age 40 or older
- Women at high risk for breast cancer as indicated by family history or other risk factors are advised to go for early screening.
- The ideal time for the test is about 10 days from the start of your period.
- Restrict caffeinated beverages for about a week before your next mammogram.
- It's best to take a pain reliever about one hour before the exam, after consulting a physician.
- Screening mammography (including digital mammography) should not be used in pregnant women, especially during the first trimester.
- It's best to wait until you stop breastfeeding to get a routine screening mammogram.

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About IMA: Indian Medical Association is the only representative, national voluntary organization of Doctors of Modern Scientific System of Medicine, which looks after the interest of doctors as well as the well being of the community at large. It has its Headquarter in Delhi and State / Terr. Branches in 30 States and Union Territories. It has over 2, 60,000 doctors as its members through more than 1765 active local branches spread across the country.

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