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Breast Health supplement study shows promise: investigator

GUELPH — Results of a study on a supplement promoting breast health are encouraging, a scientist said Monday.

"It's quite exciting," said Maggie Laidlaw, lead investigator for Guelph-based Nutrasource Diagnostic, an independent firm that analyzes products like health supplements. It's the kind of research, she said, government's don't fund.

Coming on the heels of the research, her firm's now involved in a subsequent followup study of benefits to women in greater risk categories, like older females.

Laidlaw and colleagues presented their findings on the femMED Breast Health supplement at a science conference earlier this month in Washington. D.C.

Toronto-based femMED, founded by chief executive Shauna Page, offers a line of 13 physician-formulated supplements made from herbs, vitamins and minerals.

"This company is very big on supplements for women," Laidlaw said, noting femMED has distinguished itself by seeking independent clinical trials, like the one on its Breast Health product, to delineate health benefits.

For this study, the natural food analysis and consulting firm on Research Lane that Laidlaw works for conducted a 28-day trial on 47 premenopausal women and 49 who were post-menopausal, some given the breast health supplement and the remainder placebos. The supplement administered, containing extracts and vitamins, promoted a more healthy metabolism of estrogen, the female sex hormone that regulates the menstrual cycle and is associated both with benefits and maladies like cancer.

Laidlaw, perhaps best known locally as a veteran city councillor, said the supplement boosted a beneficial form of estrogen in the body, leading to a corresponding reduction in one associated with higher risk of ailments. (The respective scientific terms are C-2 hydroxylation and C-16 hydroxylation metabolites.)

"The results were interesting," said Laidlaw, eager to continue more in-depth work through a subsequent study now underway.

Meanwhile, the supplement is already available on shop shelves, notably at health food stores.

The Breast Health results were presented at the Experimental Biology 2011 science gathering. They were also published in the journal Breast Cancer: Basic and Clinical Research by New Zealand-based Libertas Academica.

Nutrasource, she added, is also in the early stages of a study into supplements to boost women's libido and aid in menopause.

Nutrasource, Laidlaw said, has no connection to femMED Diagnostics outside a professional arms-length relationship testing some of its products.

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