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Q13 FOX

Wellness Report: New DNA Test Identifies Important Enzyme

by Lara Yamada

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Chances are you haven't heard of an enzyme called "CYP-2D6." 200,000 men and women are diagnosed with breast cancer every year and 40,000 die. One reason is the lack of that enzyme--which can stand between you and your treatment. There is a simple test that can save your life--and thousands of others.

DNA testing is not just for crime scenes anymore.

"In 2000 we started doing DNA testing to see how people would respond to medicines," says Howard Coleman. He is the founder of Genelex which is a Seattle company that started out in 1987 doing forensic and paternity tests. A few years ago, he learned about a little known genetic problem.

"I read a story about a boy who died from overdose of Prozac," he says, "and the reason he died was because he could not process the Prozac."

It turns out, some people don't have an enzyme in the body, that the liver uses to process what are called "fat-soluble" drugs.

Prozac, Paxil, Saint John's Wort, even cough syrup are fat-soluble. In fact, the list includes at least half of the most common medications on the market right now--including Tamoxifen--the cancer-fighting drug often used to treat breast cancer.

"10% of the population right now cannot activate Tamoxifen, says Coleman, "and if you don't have the ability to activate it, it's not going to work! But we can discover that with the DNA test."

"I found out after my first mammogram. I had no symptoms." says Janine Miller who found out in February that she had breast cancer. She did the research, took the test, and put her mind a bit more at ease.

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"It just helped me get through everything as best I could, for a very difficult situation."

She took a simple DNA test. Genelex offers one for \$295--so should your doctor, and Coleman says it's usually covered by medical insurance.

"It's just a Q-Tip inside the mouth, people can do it inside the comfort of their own home, it's really not a big deal," he says.

Coleman says they've also discovered that many drugs, not just the lack of an enzyme, can also interfere with treatments like Tamoxifen, but a simple test, and the advice of your doctor, should help you find the right treatment for you.

"It's up to the patients, really," says Coleman, "in some of these things to take the lead and make them happen."

The test also comes with a software service program called GeneMedRx which interprets the DNA test results within the framework of all of the medicines the patient is taking. You and your doctor can both get a full report, to find out what's working and what's not.

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