

Real Health Podcast

Brought to you by the Riordan Clinic



Episode#46: Prevention and Control of Breast Cancer

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Intro: This is the Real Health Podcast brought to you by Riordan Clinic. Our mission is to bring you the latest information and top experts in functional and integrative medicine to help you make informed decisions on your path to real health.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Welcome, everyone. This is the Real Health Podcast, and I'm your monitor today. I'm Dr. Ron Hunninghake here at the Riordan Clinic. It's my privilege to have Dr. Kirsten West with me today. She's a board certified naturopathic oncologist, and she is with the Riordan Clinic now. We're so happy to have you on board, Kirsten.

Dr. Kirsten West: I'm so happy to be part of the Riordan Clinic.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Yeah. We have our co-learners listening in. We have people who are wondering what goes on at the Riordan Clinic. We're interested in helping people work their way to better health. I say work, because you don't just fall off the log, you have to work at it. So, it's breast cancer awareness month now. That's why I've asked you to be on the program to share with us some of what we all need to know – men and women – about breast cancer, what causes it? But more importantly, what can we do to prevent it? Or if we are dealing with a breast cancer situation, what can we do to remediate it?

Dr. Kirsten West: Yeah. We're certainly seeing more and more of it. I know that I see quite a bit of it in practice. It's probably the cancer that I see more of than any other cancer. We're also seeing it in younger women. It's an important topic, and it's important things to address. Like you said, for people who are trying to prevent, but also people who have been diagnosed with breast cancer, there's several things that we can pay attention to and do.

Dr. Kirsten West: I think that one of the areas ... There's actually three areas that I see the most of, the three patterns that are probably the most prominent. Number one is stress. No surprise there. Stress is a big one. Metabolic imbalance and then hormonal imbalance as well. That kind of ties into

environmental toxins. Those are the three areas that I think that we can really do a great service to ourselves and to others to educate about how we can change these patterns and hopefully change the course of seeing more breast cancer.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: It's also the results of stress. A lot of people don't sleep very well when they're stressed. We know that sleep deprivation actually can have a role to play in this. Yeah.

Dr. Kirsten West: Exactly. I mean, so many of us are up at night on computers or watching television, that's our relaxation now is watching TV or watching shows on Netflix before bed. We're exposed to all that blue light. That's the time when our pineal gland should start secreting melatonin and put our cells to sleep, to repair damage that's occurred during the day. And we're not getting that feedback. Our whole body has a rhythm. Our cells have rhythm. And if we're off of that rhythm, we're not living our physiological best as far as health goes.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Yeah. We also need that support from one another. That can echo from the past, too. I think one of the things I've learned with the whole metabolic approach to cancer is that past traumas and things that are disrupting our current relationships, that can have a role to play in breast cancer.

Dr. Kirsten West: Absolutely. Those past traumas trickle down into our current life, and they've actually been shown to change brain patterns and brainwaves and how we actually come at current situations. So, for so long, we've thought of stress response or dealing with psychological issues is a top-down thing. But I think that we need to work from the bottom up and really work to clear those patterns from a body level. That's where additional things, if there is trauma in your life, neurofeedback or EMDR or simple things like yoga. I mean, we combine mind and body with yoga and getting outside and forest bathing, earthing, getting your feet in the grass. How many of us do that anymore? We probably did it when we were 3 and we've lost it. Those are all really important things that I think we've just forgotten about being so busy in our current society.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: I believe that cultivating healthy relationships in our present day life right now is highly important. Our friendships are the people we work with, our mates, all of these people are important to us. If we can learn to be a little bit more forgiving, a little bit more understanding and cultivate that kind of friendship, that's an anti-cancer action step.

Dr. Kirsten West: Oh, absolutely. There have actually been studies for women, specifically with ovarian cancer and breast cancer, women who have more of a female group or female tribe, they actually have increased overall survival. There's something about that community that is so important. It feeds our soul and it feeds our body. Yeah.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: This next big topic, the metabolic factors, that's huge. Unfortunately, in our time, it's something like 70% to 80% of Americans have the metabolic syndrome where they are not processing sugar very well and they're not making very many good food choices. But from your perspective as an oncologist, how do you see this fitting in?

Dr. Kirsten West: Well, I think that this actually ties into the circadian rhythm, too, because before, our bodies, we're so smart, we've got these great brains, but our brains ... Our society has actually evolved a little bit quicker than our physiology has. Our bodies are still set to have periods of time where maybe

we get a squirrel for lunch and we don't eat for dinner and we don't eat breakfast. We weren't the best hunters. Thank goodness for our brains for farming and all of that. But now we have this time where we can grab a snack whenever we want to. We can graze throughout the day if we want to. We can eat 9:00 or 10:00 p.m. at night. And it doesn't help us from a metabolic perspective. It drives metabolic disorders. It also ties into that circadian rhythm, where our bodies are just off of that inherent cellular rhythm that we should have, that we should be living with.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: If you're snacking more and fast fooding more, the convenience stores and whatnot, you get a lot more sugar and you get a lot of the wrong oils. These wrong oils are disrupting mitochondrial functioning, and that goes right to the heart of cancer.

Dr. Kirsten West: Right, and it promotes inflammation. We know that cancer and inflammation go hand-in-hand. In fact, I know you've spoken to this in the past, but cancer's considered a wound that doesn't heal. And a wound that doesn't heal is chronic inflammation. So, if what we're putting in our mouth is driving those inflammatory patterns, then voilà, it sets up the terrain for developing a cancering process. Speaking about mitochondria, this is where intermittent fasting really comes in, because if we can intermittent fast, we slow down our mitochondria, stop reactive oxygen species, well, we slow down the creation of reactive oxygen species, which promotes health of the mitochondria. That also decreases risk of carcinogenesis. That goes into the meal timing as well.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: On the other side of the coin here, in terms of what are the good foods that people need to be looking for, what's your concise way of helping people? Because there's a lot of confusion about what should I eat or what shouldn't I eat?

Dr. Kirsten West: Oh, absolutely. We're going to actually go into this, I think, in January, February with some podcasts specifically about nutrition and cancer. But I think that what I tell my women with breast cancer is a Mediterranean diet, preferably a low carb Mediterranean diet. Because that way of eating incorporates nuts and seeds, vegetables, organic as often as you can possibly get. Like I said, the nuts and seeds, herbs and spices. Herbs and spices, we forget, are some of our best cancer fighters. I mean, you add rosemary to a burger or to chicken that you're cooking on the grill and you're going to decrease some of the toxic load from that, so simple. But also lots of olive oil and clean fish. Important to look at ewg.org to figure out the best fish. But fish is also a great thing for us to be focused on. That's what I say, low carb Mediterranean. If you can do that, you've got it dialed in.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: I've often said, just look down at your plate and you should be seeing a whole bunch of colors.

Dr. Kirsten West: Yes.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: If you're seeing colors and spices, you're getting phytonutrients. These plant-based molecules for time immemorial have helped humans and other creatures live in a more healthy way. So, if you're doing that, you're helping your immune system, you're controlling inflammation, you're improving your microbiome and your gut, all of these things go into preventing and treating cancer, breast cancer, all cancers.

Dr. Kirsten West: Yes, absolutely. The more variety of vegetables that you have, the more you're diversifying your microbiome. We know that that's the seed of your immune system. To speak to looking

at the plate, too, I think for so long in America, we've thought of our meat as our main meal, and the main piece of our meal or our plate, and really what it needs to be is a side car to our plate full of all of the colorful vegetables and nuts and seeds and herbs and spices.

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Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Can we go into that third big area, which is hormonal imbalance? I think there are many sources for why this is happening. Maybe you can unpack some of that for us.

Dr. Kirsten West: Yeah. I think that and I know that many women are aware of this now, and they're actually putting it down on their new patient paperwork, which is great, but use of birth control pills at a young age, I mean, I know that there's even studies now showing that that does increase risk of breast cancer, was such an easy thing to do, nobody really thought wrongly of it for years. Now, we're seeing it increases risk as happens with many things. But that's a big piece. Then the other thing is our endocrine disrupting chemical, estrogen-like endocrine disrupting chemicals, which are found in so many places. Those things, they're found in plastics, they're found in foods. They actually have been shown to promote puberty earlier in so many young women. So, we're getting these exposures to these exogenous hormones, which our bodies were not meant to deal with. So, when you think about those things and their exposure over years, that can lead to breast cancer.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Yeah and the range-fed beef. If you're going to eat meat, try to get clean beef because they oftentimes inject the cattle with estrogen just prior to taking them to market.

Dr. Kirsten West: Growth hormones, yeah, estrogen's a growth hormone, they want things to grow. That's what they do to fatten up the beef prior to putting them on the shelves. It's really important to make sure that, again, coming back to food, what you're putting in your mouth is as clean as you can get and also what you're putting on your body.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Yeah. Your weight makes a difference here, too, because that can expose you to more estrogen-like compounds as well.

Dr. Kirsten West: Right. We tend to store a lot of those toxins in our fat cells. We also know that fat has aromatase activity. So, the more weight gain that women tend to hold, the higher their exposure to estrogens, which is why the studies have shown that some of the best prevention for breast cancer is keeping yourself at a healthy BMI. After developing breast cancer, making sure that if you're not at a healthy BMI, you're getting there.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Then going back to the colorful foods, broccoli and some of these other foods actually help block estrogen receptors.

Dr. Kirsten West: Yeah. It's such a good point, because they contain a component called diindolylmethane, which actually decreases the production of carcinogenic estrogens in the body. Then

the sulforaphanes are also so helpful as hormone modulators as well. Something as simple as ground flax seeds every day can help to decrease the enterohepatic, big word, but basically stop us from reabsorbing those carcinogenic forms of estrogen and getting them out in our GI tract.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Those foods also, back to the microbiome, they basically help us maintain a better weight. They found that you could transfer one microbiome to another person and actually cause them to gain weight or lose weight depending upon what microbes are getting into the microbiome. So, all of this ties together.

Dr. Kirsten West: Yeah. I mean, some supplement companies are getting on this and starting to create probiotics that have been studied to actually help to decrease weight or decrease appetite. Yeah.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: I would be remiss if I didn't mention dental health, because Dr. Thomas Levy tells me all the time, if we have a breast cancer patient, be sure and have them check and make sure they don't have any serious infections, possibly infected root canals, gingivitis. Those kinds of things, believe it or not, the lymphatic drainage goes right down into the breast tissue and can be a major causative factor in breast cancer.

Dr. Kirsten West: Yeah, absolutely. You can actually find teeth charts or tooth charts online that show the relation to organs for certain teeth. It is pretty incredible the correlation when people do have dental issues and then you see that the breasts are that area of the mouth that have been affected. But it's all connected. It is all connected.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: This is going a little bit off topic, but a lot of women ask about thermography and the benefits of it versus mammography. Could you speak to that just a little bit, Dr. West?

Dr. Kirsten West: Yeah. The bottom line with thermography is that you want to establish a baseline and then continue to use it. Because it's not going to act as much of a ... If you get one, it's not going to be diagnostic, right. I mean, if they're really seeing a strong pattern, it may be helpful to point you in the direction of cancer. But the key to thermography, what thermography does is it's looking at specific heat patterns within the breast. We know what we have learned is that cancer has more of a heat pattern, because there's no blood vessels going to it. So, there, you'll see different patterns on thermography with cancer. So, it's good to get a baseline and then continually go every three to six months. The thermographer will help to recommend that based on the patterns that they're seeing.

Dr. Kirsten West: You can do that as a nice way of being like, "Is there anything we need to worry about here? Is there anything that's going to push us into maybe getting some more diagnostic testing?" If there is something that is seen, that's when we think about, "Well, maybe we do want to consider ultrasound or we want to consider MRI or we want to consider a mammogram." But it's a good start to get some more information about the actual patterns in the breasts.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Okay. Last but not least, let's not forget our friend the sun and how being in the sun can really enliven our vitamin D levels. Vitamin D is a pretty huge factor these days in terms of the whole cancer equation, right?

Dr. Kirsten West: Oh, absolutely. And it's such a simple blood test. If we could just all ... What a great way to prevent disease is to just, we should all have our vitamin D levels checked. If we're low, it's an

easy thing to supplement with. Unfortunately, even people who live in Hawaii are deficient in vitamin D. So, we can be outside as much as we want. I tell patients all the time, they're like, "Well, I stopped taking my vitamin D over the summer because I'm outside." And I'm like, "Well, let's still check your levels and we may still need to be supplementing with it." Absolutely, it affects over 200 genes that can be associated with cancering. So, wonderful, easy thing to do.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Yeah. Any other thoughts in terms of this whole thing? Because I know there's a big fear factor in women because the rates have been rising. We've given a number of really good ideas in terms of prevention. These same things can help women who have early stage or even late stage cancer to start to turn it around. Is there an attitude about breast cancer that you can think of would help women relax a little bit and feel more confident that they can prevent or control this problem?

Dr. Kirsten West: Right. I think that, first of all, the things that we spoke about, those are big areas and the top areas that I seem to see or tend to see in clinical practice. Those are things that we can absolutely address. I also think that we also need to remember that cancer doesn't happen overnight. We are in control. We're in more control of this than we think we are. I think empowerment is important.

Dr. Kirsten West: There's been studies showing that 90% of cancer is due to more lifestyle factors than it is actually genetics. That should take the feeling of not being in control into feeling more empowered about our health. Then I think a big thing, too, is testing. We just talked about with vitamin D, if you're worried about getting cancer, if you have a family history of cancer, start making these steps, like we spoke about, get in with a functional medicine or a naturopathic doctor or somebody who is well-versed in these things. But most importantly, get some lab work done, look at your terrain, see what's going on, see if there's some patterns that your body's telling us that maybe you didn't realize were there that you can address.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Yeah. Here at Riordan Clinic, Dr. Riordan made this one word very famous, co-learning. We believe that if people can partner with us, we're going to help you feel more empowered in your whole process of learning about yourself and feeling good about taking better care of yourself as a way of prevention. Obviously, early detection is very important, but if you can be robustly healthy, you can actually prevent these problems.

Dr. Kirsten West: Yeah. What did he always question people? He always used to say, "What is the most important nutrient?" He used to ask people that. Right?

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: The one you're lowest in. So, if you don't measure, you'll never know what it is.

Dr. Kirsten West: Unless you test, assess, address. Right?

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Yes.

Dr. Kirsten West: Unless we figure out what the body's telling us. That's another important piece to prevention. Gosh, I think if we were checking labs, nutrient levels on everyone, we'd probably see less rates of disease because we would be doing what we needed to, to change some patterns.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Very good. Well, Dr. West, thank you so much for being on again and doing such a wonderful job of helping all of us understand what we can do to take better care of ourselves and, you, take care also.

Dr. Kirsten West: Oh, I will. It's always a pleasure.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: All right. Thanks again.

Dr. Kirsten West: Thank you.

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