

Real Health Podcast

Brought to you by the Riordan Clinic



Episode#54: Remission Nutrition: Using Food as Medicine

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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: Well, welcome everyone. It's Dr. Ron Hunninghake again with our Real Health Podcast. And today, it's my pleasure to have with us Jen Nolan, who's the owner and oncology nutrition consultant at Remission Nutrition. And there they are a science-based organization that provides metabolically-focused oncology nutrition therapy since 2010. So that's a mouthful, Jen. Kind of interpret that for us. What does that really mean?

Jen Nolan: It is. Well, we specialize in oncology nutrition consulting, and we do quite a lot of one-on-one consulting with clients, and we work with people who are maybe going through a cancer journey currently or have in the past, or maybe are looking to prevent. Maybe they have family members that have gone through it or are going through it. So it's one-on-one consulting, and we coach people through lifestyle and nutrition to help in their journey.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: I think it's actually being well-recognized how important nutrition is in the cancer journey, as you say. And what exactly are some of the challenges that you face dealing with a patient? They come in and say, "Okay, I've got X, Y, or Z type cancer." We know that cancer has a fundamentally similar beginning and etiology. So how do you approach the patient because there's all kinds of different ideas about vegetarian versus this, that, or the other. What's the starting point in terms of helping patients get on the right track?

Jen Nolan: Well, it's a great question, and I feel like every one of our clients comes to us in a different place. So some people may be eating a very standard American diet, in which case there's a lot of cleaning house for us to do. We might not go directly to a real therapeutic diet. We might just say,

"Okay, let's get you eating less sugar or no sugar, no processed foods, eat at home if possible, really focus on whole foods before we get really deep into a therapeutic diet." We kind of have to do some of the groundwork first or the foundational things. And then we often use more of a ... I like to use more of a Mediterranean-style ketogenic diet for some clients. Definitely it's going to be very metabolically friendly, so very low carbohydrate and nutrient dense. So we don't necessarily push people toward a vegetarian diet, but I love a more plant-forward or plant-dense diet. That's really important.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: The plants are full of phytonutrients, which are wonderful cancer fighters, and hopefully, people get the idea that if we eat real food, we're going to be getting that extra defensiveness against the cancer as well as being ... A good defense is a good offense as well. So what would be some of the things that you would do in terms of getting people focused in that direction? What would a day's meals look like that was more emphasizing plants?

Jen Nolan: Well, I like to explain to people that if the majority of their plate is filled with plants, and then oftentimes, you think about a lot of meat eaters might eat, half of their plate might be meat. And so we're really cutting back on that, it might be more like a side dish. And we would have healthy fats. Olive oil is my favorite. Maybe some nuts and seeds, fatty fish, but really plant-forward, like I said. So focusing on... I have people look at a plate and I'm like, "Okay, when you look at a meal or a shake or a smoothie type of a thing, you ask yourself, where are the carbohydrates in that meal? Hopefully they're from a lot of vegetables. Where's the fat? Where's the protein?" And then it's a lot of balancing, and that's really important for our blood sugar, which we know is so hugely important as well.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: For many years, I've encouraged patients to look down at their plate and see at least five colors. The colors are ... The Color Code was a great little book that helped me to understand that's the best way to get all these really good things in there.

Jen Nolan: Yes.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: You mentioned the oils. I think the oil issue is huge in our time. So could you talk a little bit about what people need to avoid and what they can use in their place in order to get good fats?

Jen Nolan: You bet. Like I said, I love olive oil. I love using avocados, nuts, and seeds. Avoiding seed and nut oils is really important because they can be very inflammatory to the system. And then oftentimes, when we're eating out, that's the oil we're going to get. So it's really hard to control when we're eating out. So that goes back to trying to eat home-cooked, real foods, as possible. Some grass-fed butter and gee, for some people, is just fine and lovely. I tend to use more lean meats that are very pasture-raised, grass-fed, more lean, and then add the oil to the top. So like I said, I know I keep saying olive oil, but it really is my favorite.

You can make chimichurri sauces, pestos, things like that, drizzle it on top of your food. In cooking, I'll use grass-fed butter, gee, coconut oil, that can withstand higher heat, some avocado oil. But really staying away from, like I said, the canola oils and the soy oils and peanut oils, those things that a lot of people do a lot of high heat cooking with those oils because they can. And I also would say low and slow cooking is really critical, so not heating things real high.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: And this kind of moves us into the whole concept of how we're taking care of our metabolism. And in the realm of cancer, cancer cells have actually shifted their metabolism to being

primarily sugar burners. And so it's pretty well known now that if we can keep the sugar intake down, we can help suppress the growth of the cancer cells. And so that kind of leads into the ketogenic diet, but a lot of people are a little bit confused about ketogenic, or they jump in it too much too fast. How do you approach lowering the sugar and improving the metabolic health of the patient?

Jen Nolan: Yeah, I have a tendency to slowly enter into a ketogenic diet more gradually or gently. It again depends on the person, if they're real ready. Or if they maybe have glioblastoma, there's a lot of research that shows that with brain cancer that can be very effective. And with them, I might try to go a little bit more quickly, but generally, I would ease somebody in, so we would start cutting back on their carbohydrates. I would say sugar, like I had mentioned, is something that if we take that out, that takes care of a lot of the carbs. And grains, so grain-based carbohydrates like wheat, oats, rye, all of those. If you take those out, that also takes care of a lot of the carbohydrates.

So we start to ease those things out. And food logging is really, really important. So I can help people with that where they're writing down what they're eating, it raises awareness, it's a great education piece if they're up for it, and it helps me help them. So then I can see how many. It's like, where's your baseline? What are you doing now? And where can we move from there? How can we shave off those carbohydrates? And then really, my words are usually spend your carbs wisely. So if we're trying to keep your carbohydrates low, I would love for you to spend those carbohydrates on all those lovely vegetables we were just talking about.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Another part of the vegetables and the colors that we didn't mention but should be mentioned is that we know that a lot of cancer grows out of toxicity, and if your body is toxic and you may not even know how toxic it is. How is it that plants and the phytonutrients in plants, how do they help with this detoxification process?

Jen Nolan: Well, I think there's many different ways that they can help. One of the things that I focus a lot on is detoxing through the gut. And so if you're eating, a lot of people when they go into a ketogenic diet, it's pretty high fat, it might be pretty low fiber if they're afraid to eat vegetables, which happens with a lot of folks. And so they're not getting a lot of the fiber, which can really be problematic when we're trying to detox through the gut. So there's all different kinds of pathways for detoxing. Through the liver, I might use certain vegetables for liver love. I would call it like bitter foods are really great, and we're going to get that from our vegetables. So radicchio is one, or lemon zest is really great, or dandelion greens, those are also colorful vegetables. So that's what I would do.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: And also Dr. West, who's one of our doctors, she encourages people to get brags with all the various herbs in it.

Jen Nolan: Love it.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Because herbs are colors and they're rich in phytonutrients that's going to help out with detoxification. Another aspect of eating whole foods that's going to be very important in the cancer patient is the, what whole foods do for the microbiome. And what we're finding out is that stress and trauma in patient's lives do have an effect on their gut. It's the gut feeling, but it goes both ways. If you take care of your gut in terms of the healthy foods, it can actually help you deal with stress better. Has that been your experience?

Jen Nolan: Absolutely. Yep. There's such a connection. There's that communication system between the gut and the brain, and they do, they work both ways. So if the gut's happy, the brain can be happy. If the brain's happy, the gut can be happy. Yeah, and the immune system, so much of the immune system lies in the gut as well. So it's a big focus for us. We call it the tube, and how can we care for the tube? So we might use for some people live foods. That's another thing with fiber, and it's got the prebiotic fibers and the probiotics. So really, really important part of what we do.

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Dr. Ron Hunninghake: So when you work with cancer clients, obviously you're working as an educator. How much do you feel like you are someone that's helping them achieve accountability? Is that part of what you do? I mean, that's the old dietician perspective, and I know you're way beyond that, but how do you enter into that relationship with the patients such that they feel like you're part of their support team and not just looking over their shoulder and counting calories?

Jen Nolan: As much as I have had some clients tell me that they hear my voice sometimes when they're making choices, or there's a little Jen on my shoulder. I'll hear that sometimes. But I definitely feel like the relationships that I get with our clients, many of our clients, is very rich and loving and supportive and truthful. We do a lot more than just talk about food, I would say, and people feel really ... I feel like they feel really supported and loved and they can be honest, and there's not judgment, and I don't think they feel that from us. I certainly like to use, like I was saying before, that food logging piece, because that's a bit of an accountability piece for them, but it's more about not me looking over their shoulder, but them being empowered to make these changes and recognize how well they're doing. And it feels really good. And so I think that's more, rather than me pointing my finger, "Wait a minute, you didn't do X, Y, and Z."

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: A lot of people feel tremendous guilt, first of all about cancer alone, but then they feel guilty about, "Well, I've always eaten crummy." And they have a bad relationship with food. And so it almost seems to me like you're helping people learn to love their food because they know it's good for them. It's going to help them heal. So you are, in a sense, transforming their relationship with food through your relationship with them in a really cool way, it sounds like to me. So I was going to ask you, how did you get into this? I mean, what's your background and how in the world did you get interested in working with cancer and nutrition?

Jen Nolan: Yeah. Well, going back quite a long time, my mom was only 42 when she was diagnosed with breast cancer, and she lived until she was 56. So she lived a long time with breast cancer, and I really followed along with her and was with her in that journey. And I always say, had I known then what I know now, it would've been different. But I learned a lot, and I learned the importance of this holistic nutrition. So I did end up going to school to become a dietician in Colorado, and that was my first step in toward nutrition while she was still alive. And I found out pretty quickly ... I went through the program, but it was just disheartening for me because it wasn't what I was ... I really was expecting more of what foods can help us rather than what foods can we eat or not eat while we're in the hospital sick.

That's what it felt. It was less about prevention and all of that. So I wound up doing some more holistic nutrition training. I got my master's in holistic nutrition, and then kept kind of piling on. And then when I heard Jess Kelly was writing "The Metabolic Approach to Cancer," and once she was done, she was going to have a program, I jumped. I started stalking her really, and was like, "When can I do it? When can I do it?" And so cancer was always really interesting to me. And so I did the oncology nutrition consulting program through her, and it was just the icing on the cake. That's a terrible analogy when we're talking about nutrition, but I did feel really ... It just felt so good, and I feel like now every day I'm honoring my mom, and it feels really amazing.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake:

Yeah, that's wonderful. So I think in order for people to really address and face their cancer, they have to look at their lives. And we spend a lot of our days eating and shopping and thinking about food. And so it's part of a transformational process that people have to go through in order to get to the other side instead of having cancer, they begin to look at it as a different type of an experience that they can actually grow from and achieve remission. So this Nutrition Remission name for your business is really cool because that's really the goal. I mean, you should start with a goal in mind no matter what you're doing. So I'm assuming you build that into your discussions with patients.

Jen Nolan: Yeah, you bet. And I think you said something earlier, Ron, that was really interesting because... So some people come to us and they're like, "I've eaten well my whole life." And everybody's looking for the reason, and that's okay. We want to find the root causes, of course, but it's not just about the food. It's about so much more. But we can think about food as medicine and food as a tool, and we can change some things up and tweak some things, and that's pretty powerful. That's a tool. It's not that we're blaming food on giving us cancer. Some people have been eating maybe McDonald's their whole life, and that can play some roles, but I just feel like, I think it's important to recognize that we can use food as medicine.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: So we're actually transforming nutrition from a noun into a verb, that really you're wanting to learn how to nutrify your body in a way that you're not just worrying about toxins, you're learning how to detoxify. So it shifts it. And it's not how much do you exercise, but what kind of exercises and how do you feel when you exercise? What is the quality of your sleep? It's all about people learning how to take better care of themselves is what it really boils down to, but they have to make that decision to do so. And there's probably no bigger area in terms of making decisions than deciding what you eat each day. So you're basically helping people be better deciders for themselves because you can't ... Well, you can be on those shoulder, but you really can't follow them around. But yeah.

Jen Nolan: Yeah. It's pretty special work, and it is holistic. There's just so much at play, and it's a scary time. And when people receive a diagnosis or their family members, and it's something that they can actually do that feels like it's within their control. Not to say there's a lot of food, unhealthy relationships with food, of course. There's a big spectrum, and a lot of people, all of us probably, fall somewhere in that spectrum. But we can help repair that and help people feel more comfortable and love food and not be so fearful, because that does happen sometimes when people might get a diagnosis, and they go super-duper extreme, and then they become afraid of everything. I always tell people, we can't live in a bubble. We're going to be exposed to some toxins. What we want to do is support our body and have faith that our body can deal with those toxins with the help of maybe food and other things. So yeah.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Yeah. We have to take a look at all of our relationships when we get this kind of a diagnosis. And this is just very ... We do have a relationship with food, and if we can make really good friends with good food, that's going to help us get well. How do you normally work with people? Do you do a lot of virtual counseling?

Jen Nolan: All. Yeah.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: All.

Jen Nolan: Yeah. So we're a team of three consultants, and then we have an admin/client relations manager, which is wonderful. So a lot of people really want to talk to somebody. They don't want to just set up an appointment online, they want to talk to somebody. And Anna in our office, she's just lovely. And that's great because it gives somebody a person, and it is hard because we're all virtual. It's not like they pop into the office. So she is great. And then there's three of us consulting, which is wonderful. And we're kind of all over, we're in Texas, two of us are in different parts of Colorado, and we work one-on-one, we do a lot of one-on-one coaching or consulting, and we have different packages available. You can do one of our initial consults are pretty long. They're two hours, but there's a lot that goes into that. We look at a lot of different testing if people have labs, if they have genetic testing, all the things. So there's a lot of prep preparation that goes into that. Then we meet for two hours on Zoom. Some people prefer the phone. It's nice, I love to be able to see people, but it's fine. We'll do either. And then we try to do follow-ups. It's hard to get it all in, in one two-hour session. I really like that. That's the accountability or the coaching afterwards that we do and the support. So that's how we work. We're also right now developing some group support situations, so that's still in the works, but hopefully March, next month we'll be able to start offering some of those so we can get the information to more people and even have community so they have support from each other. So that's exciting.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: I think this is great because of course we see a lot of cancer patients at the Riordan Clinic, and I always talk a lot about it, but it's never enough. And so I think it's great that you're available when people really need more intensive and deep support in their effort to improve their nutrition. They're motivated, they've got the motivation, but now they want to know how do I do it, and specifically, how do I do it within the context of the family that I'm in? Because not all family members are going to be interested in nutrition, but a lot of times if they're concerned about their loved one, they're willing to bend too.

But I think the idea of having a coach or a guide or a support in this evolution of one's dietary patterns, I think it's crucial if they want to be successful in their cancer journey. Thank you so very much for the work you do, and we're happy; we're all metabolic here. We really understand that this is the core in taking care of the terrain. The terrain itself, that's where food grows, is out of a good soil. So we're just gardeners is all we are, health gardeners. But thank you for your work and thanks for being on our program, and best of luck to you.

Jen Nolan: Thank you so much, Dr. Ron. I appreciate it.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: You bet.

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