

Breast Health 1: Overcoming Estrogen Dominance

Magdalena Wszelaki, CH, HHC



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Rebekah Kelley: Welcome to the Humanized podcast, all about personalizing your health. I'm your host, Rebekah Kelley, and today we have certified herbalist, Magdalena Wszelaki with us discussing the topic Breast Health. We know that millions of women suffer from fibrocystic breasts, which can lead to a variety of other health issues, and Magdalena is here to talk to us about that. And don't forget to subscribe and get our other variety of casts in audio, video, and transcription at HumanizedHealth.com. I'd also like to thank our lead sponsor, Village Green Apothecary, at MyVillageGreen.com.

And on to our program today. Magdalena Wszelaki is the founder of Hormones Balance, a thriving online community dedicated to helping women balance hormones naturally. Magdalena is a nutrition coach, certified herbalist, a published bestselling cookbook author, speaker and educator. Her health crisis was the direct result from a highly stressful life in advertising, starting from Graves' and Hashimoto's disease, total burnout and estrogen dominance. But today she is in full remission, lives a symptom-free life, and teaches women how to find their sacred hormonal balance with her books, online programs and education.

That's quite a walk to get to this place, Magdalena. Thanks for so much for being here with us.

Magdalena Wszelaki: Yeah. Thank you. I know we just squeezed everything into a few sentences, right? Something that just took me about 15 years to get to that point.

Rebekah Kelley: Yes. Well thank you so much for being here to share with us, because I know a lot of women have a lot of these challenges. So, I think I already kind of have a feeling, but can you talk about why you're so passionate about women's healthcare, particularly breast health?

Magdalena Wszelaki: Yeah. You know, every woman... I'm sure you can relate to this, when I say there are certain times in history that we all remember, like when Princess Diana died or when 9-11 happened, right? You remember where you were and how you felt on that day. And I think when it comes to breast health and finding, for example, a lump on their breast is one of those things that women remember for a very long time too. The problem is that it affects us a lot more because it is an ongoing issue of, I find a lump, and then next, what? How do I get it diagnosed properly? My doctor says it should be a mammogram. All the hippies are saying it's going to kill me, I should be getting a thermogram. And then you're going through that conflict, and then waiting for the results, right? And then dealing with Western medicine approach, which basically considers... if it's a benign lump or a cyst, then basically it's all about wait and see, come back in 6 months' time, one year's time, and let's just get it biopsied, or whatever it might be, or redo the test. So not a very proactive way of dealing with things.

I remember my first time I found a lump, and the terror, the fear, the confusion. Also a sense of guilt that was accompanying all of this of like, oh, it was probably all the cigarettes that I smoked in college, all the partying that I was doing, and all the drinking, and I should have taken care of myself. You know, this is like a lot of self-blame. But also, the sense of really feeling lost,

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what do you do with this? And so I felt, for most of my life I've been having lumps coming and going, and every time it was the same kind of an emotion around it, combined with the fact that most of my family members... I come from a family that, we have estrogen clearing problems on both sides of my family, so I inherited the genes for being a very poor estrogen metabolizer. And estrogen is the leading cause of estrogen receptor positive breast cancers, right? And there is breast cancer on my both sides of my family. It's like the whole accumulation of family history, the fact that I had lumps my whole life. And I don't anymore. For the past four years I have not had a lump. But that's what I've dedicated a big part of my practice, and our product development, our R and D [research and development] is to create something for women so that you don't ever have to find a lump again. And if you do, you know exactly what to do.

Rebekah Kelley: I love that. What a beautiful story. And it's so powerful the way you tell it. So obviously, estrogen's a hormone, right? And how do hormones affect breast health? You've mentioned that, but what's really going on?

Magdalena Wszelaki: Yeah. So, first of all, I just don't want to, because I mentioned estrogen is like the big bad wolf, I don't want to demonize estrogen because as women, we need it in order to function properly. So let's just establish that, right? Like women who go into menopause, have a problem with, they have a lower estrogen and with that comes a whole host of symptoms. So estrogen is not the problem, it's how we break down that estrogen to clean estrogens and dirty estrogens. We call it "estrogen metabolism." That is the problem. And so it's the dirty estrogens, I call it, those pathogenic metabolites that your liver is likely responsible for separating from the clean ones, is the issue here.

So when I talk about estrogen being a problem, it's the dirty estrogens that have a problem. Excess as dirty estrogens in the body, in a woman's case, causes a symptom, or host of symptoms, or a condition called estrogen dominance. So apart from having breast issues like swollen breasts, very engorged breasts, very painful breasts around your cycle, some women have it throughout the entire cycle. Some women who are already in menopause can still experience that, nevertheless. Finding a lump, finding a cyst, but also a lot of other things, women who have been having historically a lot of problems with their periods, painful periods, absent periods, super heavy periods, sporadic periods, spotting in the middle of your cycle, fibroids, mood swings around your cycle – you just want to bite somebody's head off, right? Women who carry a lot of fat around their thighs and butts and cellulite and just can't lose their weight no matter how much they're exercising. All of that can be due to estrogen dominance. And not to mention that the estrogen receptor positive breast cancer is the number one cancer in the country. But you also have things like other estrogenic cancers including ovarian cancer, uterine cancer, endometrial cancer, also thyroid cancer, which is the number one cancer in the United States today, as well as lung cancer in non-smokers. So you can see that there is... typically when you have breast issues, it's oftentimes combined with something else in that whole spectrum of estrogen dominance.

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So this is where the hormone, the excess estrogen, the excess dirty estrogen, can be causing inflammation in the body. It's a highly inflammatory hormone when it's not opposed, when it's not excreted properly. PS here – when you're constipated a lot of the time you're recirculating estrogen, so that's another dirty estrogen. So that's another little hint here. Make sure that if you are suffering from a lot of the symptoms I just mentioned, you want to have a really good bowel movement.

So estrogen also creates a lot of inflammation in the breast. Our breasts have a lot of receptors for estrogen. Unfortunately, when there's what we call the dirty estrogens, they tend to do a lot of work in the breast as well, causing a lot of inflammation. We have a lot of lymph nodes and lymphatic passages in the breast, as well. A lot of fat tissue. So guess what? So estrogen likes to deposit itself into fat tissue. It swells up our lymphatic passages in the breast, so what that causes is enlargement. I mean, there are women, Rebekah, there are women who can go from cup A to cup C within a course of 2,3 days because the breasts swell up so much. They don't want to be intimate, they don't want to go and do sports, they don't want to... they can't put on a bra because it's so painful, right? So it can be hugely problematic.

And estrogen can also work in a way that it can be what we call cyclical fibrocystic breasts. So that goes with your cycle, typically starts after ovulation and goes on till your period. That's when you have more swelling and it all comes down. But some women who suffer from an ongoing estrogen dominance and have especially low progesterone levels, they would have that throughout their entire cycle.

Lastly, you don't have to be still cycling. You can be in menopause and find a lump or cyst on your breast. So that is just one thing I want to mention, and that's typically very much estrogen dominance driven.

Rebekah Kelley: So you mentioned inflammation. So I'd love to talk a little bit more about that, especially when you went in and explained how it's creating the swelling and the discomfort and probably also that's related to the pain that's also happening at the same time. How does that play? Are there things that we can do? Are there diets? Are there activities? What are the things that we can do? Like, what's happening beyond that? And what can we do to help manage that?

Magdalena Wszelaki: Yeah. So, you know, inflammation is such a broad term and so many things can cause it, right? Estrogen dominance is definitely a contributing factor. And like you said, diet is... I think we were trained through Western medicine – it's like, your head is separate from your gut. Your skin has nothing to do with your gut, right? Which is like, so not true. So when we say inflammation, diet, hormones, it's all correlated. And so for example, by making a change in your diet, you can correct not only inflammation and lower it, but also you can correct estrogen dominance pretty quickly.

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So what can you do? I mean, the first thing is I'm all about removing certain things that are really adding fuel to the fire and then adding a lot of really great things. So let's start off with the removal part. I have found that throughout over a decade being in practice, that things like gluten, dairy, for a lot of women, soy, corn, eggs, it could be really not your best friend. And so the best thing to do is to do the elimination diet, cut out these foods. Both my cookbooks are based on the elimination diet, so they don't use these ingredients and there's a lot of other books out there, if you want to do keto, if you want to do any of the anti-inflammatory diets, they typically subscribe to the same principles. Also, not to mention that reduction of sugar and caffeine and alcohol can make a profound difference on your breast health. We've had women saying that just by removing coffee or switching it to, let's say, black tea or green tea or white tea, their breast swelling has come down, their periods improved, their hot flashes improved. So, coffee is a really difficult one, and very helpful when you substitute it. Alcohol is another one. I mean, there's even studies showing women who consume more than five glasses of alcohol a week have about a 30% higher chance of having breast cancer. So we know for sure alcohol is not our best friend.

And lastly, what can we add? So, one of the big things, a group of vegetables that really help to not only lower inflammation overall, but it's also hugely nutritionally dense, and it supports the liver. Remember how I said the liver is what separates the estrogen from clean to dirty? So that family of vegetables is called the brassica family, or the cabbage family. So as the name implies, all the cabbages, radishes, turnips, arugula, collard greens, kale, what else? Cauliflower. Those are just wonderful vegetables. And so I always say get rid of the goddamn lettuce, because lettuce is just like 90% water, it's tasteless and it's got very little nutrients in it. Zucchini will follow right after that. And replace them with things like arugula, mustard greens, other greens. Don't do spinach. Spinach is not in that category. I'm not a fan of spinach at all. So, if you just focus on these vegetables, the liver has a special affinity for it. There is something called, these vegetables contain a substance called diindolylmethane, also known as DIM in short, a lot of people pop a supplement, but you can get that from real foods, so that's a great one. The other one that I really love is flaxseed, ground flaxseed, a couple tablespoons a day. Even though it contains natural occurring estrogens in it, it actually blocks the receptors in our body. It blocks the receptors from the dirty estrogens from coming through. So it's really quite a wonderful food that can really support you. Two tablespoons a day and a glass of water or sprinkle on top of your salad, freshly ground, it will just do the magic.

Rebekah Kelley: Wow. Thanks Magdalena, those are really valuable insights. You're so really knowledgeable. Magdalena Wszelaki can be found at www.HormonesBalance.com. That's H O R M O N E S B A L A N C E . c o m . Let me remind you to subscribe and get access to all Humanized videos, podcasts and transcriptions from all our thought leaders on personalized health at HumanizedHealth.com.

I can't wait to have you back. Thank you so much.

Magdalena Wszelaki: Thank you.