

# NATURAL HEALTH MAGAZINE-NOVEMBER 2009

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## WHAT I LEARNED FROM BREAST CANCER

**I was diagnosed with aggressive Stage II breast cancer nine years ago. I chose a natural path to wellness and I'm alive to tell my story.**

BY JULIA CHIAPPETTA; AS TOLD TO AVIVA PATZ

I never thought I'd get cancer. I ran six miles a day, and did mini-triathlons and in-line skating; I ate a sensible Mediterranean diet. I managed to take care of myself even while working 80 hours a week and traveling the globe as a successful meeting planner. I thought I was in perfect shape.

Then I felt the lump. I was 45 years old and single, living in Connecticut. It was like a mosquito bite, on the outer edge of my right breast. Since I'd been doing self-exams for years I knew immediately that this was different. I'd never felt anything like it.

My doctors performed a mammogram, but it came back negative. I wasn't satisfied. My gut told me something was wrong. But when I asked for a biopsy, the doctors gave me a hard time. "You're fine," they said, but I insisted, so they squeezed me in the next day. Twenty-four hours later I got a call from the surgeon. His first words were: "I'm very sorry and I learned a really important lesson: I need to listen to my patients more." Then he dropped the bomb: "You have Stage II Infiltrating Ductal Carcinoma. It's aggressive, and you need to do something right away."

Everything stopped. It was the most shocking and terrifying thing I'd ever heard. I immediately thought I was going to die. When I met with an oncologist, he told me that I would die—if I didn't have a double mastectomy followed by radiation or chemotherapy and a year of Tamoxifen. But I'd watched five people close to me die from what I believe was an overuse of radiation and chemotherapy. I saw them suffer slow, painful deaths—not from the cancer, but from the treatment.

I left the oncologist's office in tears. When I got home I sank into the sofa and prayed. I said, "God, I don't know what to do. You're going to have to help me." The next day, my cousin called to recommend a top breast cancer doctor in Houston. My sister called to say she was sending a nutritional video series she thought would help me. I felt my prayers were being answered and it gave me peace and fortitude.

I decided that before I accepted—or rejected—any medical treatment, I was going to do my own research. With no time to lose, and with the guidance of a scientist friend, I pored over medical journals and abstracts, watched videos, and surfed the Web to learn everything I could about my condition and how it could be treated.

One of my first moves—inspired by my research—was to chuck everything in my house that contained hormones and antibiotics and toxins like lead, parabens, and sulfates that could have contributed to my cancer. I tossed out all my food, my makeup, my shampoos, and my microwave. I threw it all away and started using only organic products with all natural ingredients.

I made over my diet, too, trading my beloved bread, cheese, pasta, and chicken for an all organic, vegan menu. I started juicing—carrots, beets, kale, spinach, Bok Choy and celery—and doing shots of wheat grass three times a day (just 1 ounce provides the nutrients of 2.5 pounds of organic green vegetables). Within two weeks, I felt amazing. Everything was stronger—my hair, my skin, my nails. I could feel my body healing. I felt so much better that I couldn't even believe I had cancer.

By the time I saw the Houston oncologist my cousin had recommended, all my tumor markers and a lot of my blood work showed levels that were back in the normal range. This doctor recommended a lumpectomy, where they remove just a margin of tissue surrounding the site of the tumor, and a sentinel node biopsy, which removes only the lymph nodes involved. This sounded right to me. He also recommended following up with radiation and Tamoxifen, but at this point I was sold on a more natural approach.

I flew home two days after the lumpectomy and continued my new diet and lifestyle regimen, all while constantly seeking the advice of nutritionists and naturopaths as well as my oncologist.

Was it difficult? It was the most difficult thing I've ever done in my life. Was I scared? Absolutely. I had clients and friends and colleagues and doctors all saying, "Are you crazy?" But I felt total peace with my decision.

I also knew that both of my parents had beaten cancer without radiation or chemotherapy. My mother had uterine cancer and a hysterectomy at age 30, after her third baby. When the doctor suggested she get chemo, she said, "I don't have time. I have three young kids." I was 5 years old at the time. My father had prostate cancer 15 years ago and chose not to have radiation but to completely change his diet instead. Both of my parents are still alive and healthy today—and they completely supported my decision.

Nine years have passed and now, at 54, I'm healthier and happier than I've ever been. I'm still juicing and drinking wheat grass and I've added organic egg whites and wild-caught salmon to my diet. I take an array of herbs and supplements and I still exercise every day—power walking and cross training with weights.

I work part-time now and I earn only about a third of what I used to. But I have never felt more free. I've learned to live with so much less. Having a big house and closet full of beautiful shoes and clothes means zero when your doctor says the word cancer. You start seeing things through completely different eyes.

Now I see beauty every day. I see how green the trees are today. I see the little flowers growing on the lawn. But at the same time I can also see pain in someone's eyes, and I get the most joy in my life from counseling other women with breast cancer, which inspired me to publish what I'd learned in *Breast Cancer—The Notebook* (Gemini Media, 2006).

Cancer didn't kill me. It woke me up to who I really am and empowered me to make my own choices. Was it a gift? Yes. It helped me find the real me.

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**BREAST HEALTH BASICS - The herbs and supplements that Julia Chiappetta, author of "What I Learned from Breast Cancer," takes for optimal breast health:**

#### **Organic Wheat Grass**

"Two ounces of wheat grass is equal to the nutrients you would get if you ate 5 pounds of organic green leafy vegetables. I have been doing shots for 9 years and can not live without them."

#### **Fresh Organic Juices**

"Carrots, celery, kale, beets, spinach, Bok Choy, broccoli, spinach—all good stuff to juice and drink daily. (Organic is the key!)"

#### **Probiotics**

"They are the bacteria that help maintain a natural balance of organisms or micro flora in the intestines and they're essential when it comes to good digestion."

#### **Muscadine Juice**

"Muscadine has one of the highest ORAC scores of any fruit produced by Mother Nature and provides a superior content of specific antioxidant compounds to fight the free radicals that enter the human body."

**CoQ10**

"Coenzyme Q10 is produced by the human body and is necessary for the basic functioning of cells. CoQ10 levels are reported to decrease with age and tend to be low in patients with some chronic diseases such as heart conditions, muscular dystrophies, Parkinson's disease, cancer, diabetes and HIV/AIDS."

**Omega 3's**

"Fatty acids have been shown to benefit cardiovascular, immune system, brain and digestive health."

**B6, B12, Folic Blend**

"The immune system needs B6 and B12 to function efficiently, and folic acid is especially important during periods of rapid cell division."

**Dindolymethane DIM**

"This product promotes a beneficial estrogen metabolism in both women and men."

**Milk Thistle**

"I take this herb to support healthy liver function. There's some evidence to support the fact that it also reduces the growth of cancer cells in breast and cervical cancers."

**Decaf Green and Herbal Tea**

"I drink these daily along with clean, distilled water."

**Vitamin D3**

"I take 6000 IU's at night before bedtime. Most women are lacking in Vitamin D3, and a deficiency has been linked to breast cancer. We get D3 through our exposure to the sun and most of us can never get enough."

**Calcium, Magnesium and Vitamin K**

"Along with supporting bones and muscles, calcium is also important in the energy production process and supports proper immune function and Vitamin K helps you to absorb your calcium ."