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Thermograms: A Hot Weapon in the War on Breast Cancer

My first hint of the importance of breast thermography came from Dr. Christiane Northrup during a PBS pledge drive several years ago. I don't recall her exact words, but I certainly remember stopping in my tracks when I heard them. And I'm so grateful, because as I mentioned before, breast cancer doesn't just run in my family, it gallops.

Northrup is a well-known authority on women's health – author of "Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom" and "The Wisdom of Menopause" – and on this particular day, she was doing her best to convince viewers that mammograms were underperforming and over-diagnosing when it came to detecting and preventing breast cancer ... and that there was something else out there we should all know about.

That something else is state-of-the-art thermography. It's been approved as a safe and effective breast screening tool by the FDA since 1982 – an adjunct to mammography – but I'll bet you've never heard of it. What a shame.

Thermography is a non-invasive imaging technology that, Northrup explained, picks up anomalies in the breast better and earlier than they show up on mammograms.

How much earlier? Eight to 10 years! No cancer-causing radiation! No painful squeezing of the breast! Unlike mammograms that we now know are problematical for women with dense breasts, thermography works on all women. And thermograms can detect abnormalities near or below the armpit, where mammograms never go.

Thermograms. Write it down, look it up, check it out. That's what I did after I first heard Northrup, and now I've had two of them in my home state of New Mexico, where Dr. Kathryn Ater, D.O.M – a Doctor of Oriental Medicine – has worked long and hard since 2007 to develop her expertise in interpreting thermograms.

You can read more about her on her website thermographynewmexico.com, where she explains that while "breast thermography is not a replacement for mammography," it is an essential tool to help women "take control of their own health." I'm for that.

Conventional breast-screen techniques (mammograms, ultrasound, MRIs) are structural, meaning they look for abnormal structures – masses or densities – in breast tissue that may or may not turn into a cancer.

Thermography is a physiological test. It uses a thermal imaging camera to detect abnormal activity in the breast – increased heat, blood flow or changing vascular patterns.

All of these are early indicators that something suspicious is happening in the breast tissue. "Pre-cancerous and cancerous masses need more nutrients than normal tissue to maintain their growth," Ater explains. If she sees a troubling hot spot in a woman's thermogram, she helps her patients think through their options for follow-up.

For some women, an ultrasound is the next best step, but most doctors and insurance companies will insist on a diagnostic mammogram first. Other women will take a wait-and-watch attitude. And still others will drastically change their lifestyle in ways that fosters breast health to can keep abnormalities from growing into malignancies.

"This is why thermograms are so preventative," says Ater, who has seen patients improve dramatically by following her breast health protocol. It's too extensive to cover here but includes: a clean diet, stressing high-fiber, low sugar, non-processed foods; getting enough sleep; managing stress; exercising; and boosting lymph flow.

And now for the bad news. Thermography is where acupuncture was 30 years ago. Mainstream medicine has billions of dollars invested in standard screening techniques, and radiologists don't study – and therefore don't trust – breast thermography, which is why most insurance companies refuse to pick up the cost of a \$200-\$300 thermogram.

Ater admits it is a "loose and unregulated" industry and finding an expert thermographer can be difficult. That's why she lists three excellent sources for further study: DrNorthrup.com, Drmostovoy.com and Mercola.com.

I don't know if thermography will save my life, but it has certainly given me a new lease on life. I don't like getting mammograms every year. All that radiation scares me. My annual thermograms focus on breast health, and I trust Ater to identify abnormalities before they develop into serious problems.

So why has your mainstream doctor never mentioned thermography? That, dear reader, is a problem you can fix.

"Breast thermography has been researched for over 30 years, and over 800 peer-reviewed breast thermography studies exist in the index-medicus." – The International Academy of Clinical Thermography