**Venita Curry (Host):** This is Memorial Health Radio with Memorial Health System Ohio. I'm Venita Curry. What happens after you are diagnosed with breast cancer, and what types of treatment options are available? We will be talking with an expert who knows the answers to these and other questions.

Joining me today is registered nurse Jane Kessler, an oncology breast health navigator, with Memorial Health System Ohio. Jane, welcome to the show.

**Jane Kessler:** Oh, thank you so much for having me.

**Host:** You know, I've read some exciting news that people in the early stages of breast cancer are living longer than they used to. Can you walk us through what the treatment options are and the success rate of those treatments?

**Jane Kessler:** Certainly, it's my pleasure and it's such an exciting time to be on the curative side of breast cancer. New treatments are coming about every day. We are all about early detection, of course, which is the number one, probably method that we have to cure cancer early, is to find it early.

If we find it early and cancer has not spread beyond the breast, we have a 95% cure rate over five years. I mean, that's excellent, 95%. Breast cancer is the number one most frequently diagnosed cancer among American women. So, there's lots of things that are out there that are for us, in October, a lot of awareness, you know, and women are very vocal about what they need and what they want. So, it's always fun to see October roll around because you see all the enthusiasm behind getting the facts associated with breast cancer.

**Host:** When you talk about early detection, there are things that we can do at home to begin that process. Can you talk to us about what we can do

**Jane Kessler:** Absolutely. Thank you. At home, there's been controversy back and forth about self-breast exams among women. However, we still advocate for them. A woman knows her own breasts better than any clinician that's seeing her once a year. So, we do still recommend that in the shower, for those women that are premenopausal, to avoid the week before your period because your breasts are tender.

However, to do a breast self-exam, starting at the nipple, going around in circles, all the way up to the breastbone all the way out to the armpit and all the way down to the rib cage, just feeling for anything suspicious. And month after month after month, when you do this, you're going to know when something is there that wasn't there last month, and you're going to come and get it checked.

**Host:** And should that be done daily or is there a certain schedule?

**Jane Kessler:** Once a month is good, and it's good to just pick a day and do it, like the 15th, say the 15th of the month, or the 1st of the month, just pick a day and do it that way every month. And like I said, we prefer it to be any time other than the week before your period, because breasts are more tender, more sensitive. And sometimes you have a thickening that might be associated with your period coming that you wouldn't detect any other time. So, pick a time outside of the week before your period. If you're postmenopausal, it doesn't matter, just pick a day and do it that day every month.

**Host:** So when we talk about treatment options, can you walk us through what they look like?

**Jane Kessler:** Absolutely. Treatment options for breast cancer are one of three. So, there's surgery, there's radiation, and there's chemotherapy. Any person diagnosed with breast cancer may have one of those modes, two of those modes, or all three of them, depending on how advanced their cancer is. So, the earlier it is, sometimes surgery is all that it takes. Sometimes it's surgery and radiation. Sometimes it's all three. The more advanced the cancer, the more likely it is that more than one of those modes is going to be involved. And chemotherapy is not like it used to be. Twenty years ago, whenever we had people in a chemotherapy chair, as well as welcoming them, we passed out a bucket because everybody was going to be sick during their infusion. That doesn't happen anymore. We have great drugs that prevent that. Fatigue is probably the thing now that is most concerning for persons going through treatment, because it is fatiguing. You're tired after a chemotherapy session.

**Host:** Is there any certain path of recovery that's different from each of these three options?

**Jane Kessler:** Sure. And each one of them is very cyclical. If we do surgery, we don't do another mode for about six weeks after. So, you heal up for six weeks before we go into either radiation or chemotherapy. Same thing, if we do chemotherapy, we heal up for a while before we do surgery or radiation. So, everything has its own timeframe plus a healing period before we move on to the next mode.

**Host:** Excellent. It might be surprising for some of our listeners, but men can be diagnosed with breast cancer too.

**Jane Kessler:** That is correct, about one in 100, as a matter of fact, and the thing about men that is different is they do not have the advantage of annual screening mammograms. Many of them would not be bothered with doing breast self-exams. Many of them would probably disregard a lump or a bump that they felt in their chest thinking, "Oh, I ran into the car door" or "The dog jumped up on me" or something like that.

So with men, they are often diagnosed at a more advanced stage than what women are diagnosed. Therefore, the treatment is often hardly ever just one mode. It's usually maybe two, maybe all three modes for men. And again, a little bit more risk factors for them because they're not diagnosed as young. Age is the number one contributing factor to developing breast cancer. And as we get older, more women and men are prone to develop breast cancer.

**Host:** I would imagine that you talk a lot about prevention. What control do we have over reducing our risk of developing breast cancer?

**Jane Kessler:** That's a great question for the month of October. As we talk about what can we do to prevent it, so many things are not preventable. We can't help the fact that we're getting older. We can't help that we are a woman or a man. Those are things that we can't help. We can't help the fact of our parents, did they have some kind of a gene that they passed on to us? Those are things that we can't do anything about, but we can do things about our diet, eating healthy, lots of fruits and vegetables, lower fat, avoiding red meats, eating more fish and chicken. Dairy products are good. Fiber is good. All of those things are good. And then, we talk about diet.

And then, the next thing we would talk about is exercise. So, the more exercise, the better. And by that, I don't mean you have to lift weights and run 10 miles a day. Walking is an excellent exercise for even people that are in the midst of breast cancer treatment. So when you think about walking 30 minutes three times a week, that is what we would recommend as the minimum amount to do. And that's an excellent way to remain healthy, to do the best you can on strengthening your long bones. Because for us women, we also know that that helps prevent osteoporosis, another risk factor as we age. So, those kinds of things are what we can do on the diet and exercise. And of course, the gold standard is to get your annual mammogram.

**Host:** Good advice. You know, the other thing is to be consistent, I believe, too. You know, you can't start a program and then stop it to get the long-term benefits. So, making sure you're sticking to some kind of routine of good health is probably advisable.

**Jane Kessler:** Absolutely. It is.

**Host:** Well, you know what, Jane, thank you so much for this conversation today. I hope our listeners feel inspired to not only take care of their breast health, but to share the good news that we are finding ways for people to live many years beyond a cancer diagnosis. Thank you, Jane, again, for sharing that information today with us.

**Jane Kessler:** Thank you so much for having me and happy October.

**Host:** Happy October. And that wraps up this episode of Memorial Health Radio with Memorial Health System. Head over to our website at mhsystem.org for more information and to get connected with one of our providers. Please remember to subscribe, rate, and review this podcast and all the other Memorial Health System podcasts.