



Dedicated to Breast Health

An interview with Suzanne Sutherland

Written by Jennifer Worley

Photography by Don Molyneaux

If Suzanne Sutherland had her way, every October would be known as Breast Health Awareness Month. Rather than focus on the disease the pink-ribbon month is widely known for, she wants women to think about being proactive in their breast health.

“Early detection is important, but prevention is the key,” says Suzanne, 45, who has made these words her professional mantra.

Suzanne is a certified thermographic technician who offers testing at her Calgary clinic, Nature’s Wisdom, and at a second location in North Vancouver, BC. Using a specialized camera, she takes infrared images of women’s breasts to determine the overall health of the breasts.

Thermography is based on the scientific premise that in order for abnormal cells to grow, they must have increased blood supply. That increased blood flow generates heat that can be measured through thermography. The testing is considered to be one of the best early detection systems for breast cancer by experts such as Dr. Christiane Northrup, bestselling author on women’s health. In addition, Suzanne notes there are many inflammation-related breast conditions that thermography can help detect or monitor, including mastitis and fibrocystic breasts.

“What I love about thermography is that it’s preventative, but still monitoring and, of course, it’s totally safe, noninvasive and radiation-free,” she says. “I feel it’s a very powerful tool.”

Thermal imaging is the latest addition to Sutherland’s lengthy natural-health career. She has practiced as a homeopath for

nearly two decades and has acquired skills in nutrition, allergy testing and biofeedback testing. As she reflects on her newest endeavour, she is still somewhat surprised that just a few years ago, she had never heard of breast thermography.

Her journey towards thermography began nearly twenty years ago, in her native London, England. In 1993, just one year after qualifying as a homeopath, she lost her mother to breast cancer.

“That profoundly affected me, for so many reasons. It’s a loss I feel to this day and it’s been almost 18 years,” says Suzanne.

So great was her loss that she found herself avoiding the topic of breast health, both personally and professionally.

“I just didn’t seem to ever work with anyone who had any breast issues. I must not have been attracting it,” she says. “But when I reached 40, I realized that, with a personal family history of breast cancer, I needed to start being proactive myself.”

By this time, many changes had taken place in Suzanne’s life. In 1993, she had immigrated to Canada and married her husband, Steve Sutherland, a Calgary wellness practitioner whom she’d met years earlier at a conference in Barcelona. Now settled in Calgary, she was introduced to thermography when she decided to go along with some girlfriends who were having the testing done at a mobile unit visiting from North Carolina. A year later, when she returned to the unit for her second test, she had an idea.

“While I was being reimaged, I was watching the lady doing it and I thought, ‘I could do that.’ And then I thought, ‘Maybe

I should.’”

“Should” became “will,” and Suzanne embarked on her training with Dr. Alexander Mostovoy, a homeopathic doctor at the Thermography Clinic in Toronto, and Dr. Robert Kane, of the International Academy of Clinical Thermology in California, both of whom have considerable experience in thermography. In 2010, she became a certified thermographic technician.

Although Suzanne focuses on thermography from a health perspective, thermal imaging has a long and varied history. It has been used by military and law enforcement organizations for surveillance, by firefighters to locate people and fire sources through smoke and by the construction industry to detect heat leaks in buildings. In 2009, thermography was used in airports to identify people who might have the H1N1 virus.

The thermographic test at Suzanne’s clinic are predominantly for the breasts but can also image the thyroid/head area as well. The infrared camera uses heat rather than light for its images, so before the test begins the client sits for 15 minutes, disrobed from the waist up, in a room kept at 20 degrees Celsius. This allows the images to show a true portrait of the heat in her breasts, unaffected by stress or the environment.

The photos can display a rainbow of vivid colours—red, pink, yellow, green, blue and even white—but not all of these hues paint a pretty picture. The increased blood supply that abnormal cells need to grow will show up on a thermogram as hot colours, such as pink and red. White represents extreme heat. Heat and hot spots are what interpreters are looking for.

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The images are sent to Dr. Mostovoy, who interprets them and compiles the results. Suzanne reviews his report with clients and discusses possible courses of action. Each breast is measured individually and is rated to determine its risk of developing breast cancer.

When the results show an elevated risk, Suzanne may suggest a number of further tests.

A saliva hormone test, for example, can uncover hormonal imbalances, which for some women translate to painful or heavy menstrual periods, prolonged breast tenderness or excessive bloating. An estrogen metabolism ratio test can determine if there is estrogen build-up in the breasts, an indicator that the liver is not doing the detoxifying job that it should be. Supplements and lymphatic drainage—a specific form of massage—may be prescribed to help establish a balance. If the results suggest greater risk, an ultrasound or a mammogram may be recommended.

Suzanne will also suggest ways for clients to improve their breast health (see sidebar). These might include simple lifestyle changes such as reducing caffeine intake, since some studies indicate that caffeine might increase estrogen levels; improving nutrition; or even reducing the amount of time a bra is worn, since prolonged wear can hamper circulation or more importantly the lymphatic system.

Suzanne is frequently asked whether breast thermography can replace mammography. She stresses that the two are completely different tests. While thermography looks at heat in the breast, it is not a structural test like a mammogram, which can pinpoint a lump or tumour. Both have their place, she says, noting that thermography is particularly useful for early



Suzanne with a client at her Calgary clinic, Nature's Wisdom.

detection and monitoring; some studies have indicated that it can pick up clues as much as eight years before abnormalities are seen with a mammogram.

“I feel this is a very positive test—it’s not meant to be scary,” says Suzanne, who recommends annual thermographic testing for every woman aged 19 or older. “Whatever your results are, you can start improving from there.”

By having an annual thermogram, women can learn what is normal for them and monitor changes from one year to the next. Ideally there will be no changes, indicating stability—or better still, changes that indicate improvement in breast health.

Suzanne devotes a great deal of her time to making women aware of breast thermography through her website, Twitter feed and printed materials and by attending trade shows throughout the year. She works with naturopaths, offering clinics to help educate their clients.

While knowledge is one thing, Suzanne ultimately wants women to take action.

“Losing my mom that way was very traumatic for me because it really did affect the way I felt about my own breasts, about my own health,” she says. “I needed to stop living with that fear and start being proactive. And when you are proactive, it’s amazing what positive energy you get from that.”

“It doesn’t matter if it’s breast cancer or heart disease. Why wait until you’ve been diagnosed? Once you look at it from that perspective, you’ll never look at it another way again.”*

Jennifer Worley is a Calgary-based writer with more than twenty years in the media industry. She has written on a wide range of topics, including health and fitness, travel and fashion. Her work has appeared in numerous publications including the Calgary Herald, Calgary Sun and Flare magazine.

Suzanne’s shares her tips for optimum breast health:

- Suzanne recommends having a regular thermography test once a year from age 19, although it is never too late to start.
- Look in the mirror. Know what’s normal for your breasts and pay attention to changes such as discolouration, variations in texture, nipple discharge, nipple inversion or puckering.
- In addition to self-exams at the same time each month, have an annual breast exam by your doctor or qualified professional.

- Wear a good-fitting bra in a natural fibre. A specialty store can help you find the correct size. Avoid underwire bras.
- Go without a bra when you can. A study of women with fibrocystic breasts has shown very positive results when participants stopped wearing bras.
- Eat cruciferous vegetables, like broccoli, cauliflower and Brussels sprouts. They contain substances that help detoxify estrogen through the liver.

- Reduce your caffeine intake. Drink green tea.
- If thermography levels are high, ask your practitioner for recommendations for further testing.
- Supplements, lymphatic drainage and diet can be useful in detoxifying the breasts.

For more information on breast health, thermography or opportunities to see Suzanne Sutherland at events, follow her on Twitter at Bkind2yrbreasts.