

# Redefining Health & Wellness

## #6

**Featured this episode:** Shohreh Davoodi, Maegan Brundage

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**Shohreh Davoodi:** Hello there, friends. You're listening to episode number six of the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast. In today's episode, I'm chatting with someone I've known since middle school - Maegan Brundage. Maegan is a 29 year old social worker living with recurrent ovarian cancer since 2015. She's also a lifestyle blogger, who hates the term lifestyle blogger, living in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

We talked in detail about her cancer diagnoses and experiences, how cancer has affected her body image and diet, imposter syndrome, and more. I do want to give a content warning for this episode because there is some discussion of medically supervised diets. If you're in a place where any discussion of diets or food restriction is triggering, you might skip this episode or at least skip that part.

To access the show notes for this episode, head to [shohrehdavoodi.com/6](http://shohrehdavoodi.com/6). That's [shohrehdavoodi.com/6](http://shohrehdavoodi.com/6).

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**Shohreh:** Hey y'all. Welcome to the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast. I'm your host, Shohreh Davoodi. I'm a certified intuitive eating counselor and certified personal trainer. I help people improve their relationships with exercise, food and their bodies so they can ditch diet culture for good and do what feels right for them.

Through this podcast, I want to give you the tools to redefine what health and wellness mean to you by exposing myths and misconceptions, delving into all the areas of health that often get ignored, and reminding you that health and wellness are not moral obligations. Are you ready? Let's fuck some shit up.

Alright, y'all. If you are listening, I just wanted to give you a heads up that I am a little bit under the weather today. I have Throat Coat tea next to me which I'm sure I'll be pounding during this interview, and I also have sprayed my throat. So if I sound a little off, that is why. But maybe I won't. Maybe I'll sound exactly the way that I always do which is the goal.

But today, I'm so excited. I am interviewing someone that I have known for a really long time. Her name is Maegan Brundage, and I'm pretty sure we have known each other since middle school thanks to the wonders of band. Maegan was a flautist, and I played the oboe. And we go way, way back and have reconnected through social media in recent years. And just based on a lot of stuff that's been going on in Maegan's life, I thought she would be a wonderful person to interview on this podcast.

So Maegan, how are you doing today?

**Maegan Brundage:** Well, hello. I actually have tea next to me, too.

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**Shohreh:** Oh, good. Tea twins.

**Maegan:** Yeah, exactly. So you're feeling bad. I've got cancer. It's all good.  
[laughs]

**Shohreh:** Right. Right.

**Maegan:** We'll get through it.

**Shohreh:** We're going to get through it together. But can you first just tell us a little bit about yourself, where you're at, what you do, so people have a little bit of background on you.

**Maegan:** Sure. So I'm living in Colorado Springs, Colorado right now. I'm a social worker. I work at Court Appointed Special Advocate. So it's a non-profit child advocacy agency. And right now, I am recovering from having ovarian cancer. I was originally diagnosed in 2015. And then it recently came back. So I've been at home for the past few months recovering from surgery and trying to recover from my chemo, the rounds of chemo that I have to go through. So I've got my tea. And it's going to be okay. We're going to get through it.

**Shohreh:** So you have ovarian cancer. Not only that, but as you mentioned, this is your second time having it. Can you talk to me a little bit about your experiences with cancer up to this point?

**Maegan:** Sure. In 2015, I was 25 years old. I'm dating myself. That's a little scary.

**Shohreh:** [laughs]

**Maegan:** But I was 25 years old. And I thought that I was just gaining weight. I was having some sort of pains a little bit, but, you know, I just explained it away with cramping and period, that kind of thing because I kind of always had really bad cramps and really bad PMS symptoms and things like that.

So I just kind of explained it away. And then, before I was actually supposed to go to Eastern Europe, the day before, I woke up, and I just looked like I was three months pregnant. But it was only on one side of my stomach. So that's when I decided to go in.

And many, many doctors later, I was diagnosed with a germ cell tumor which is ovarian cancer. So I had surgery then. They got it all in surgery. I didn't have to do chemo. So it was just the recovery that I had to deal with from the surgery.

But then, again in 2019 this year, I've been having pains actually for about a year. So my wonderful, amazing doctor that did my surgery in 2015, he moved to Denver. So I just went back to my local doctor that I had been going to, or the doctor's office. And they misdiagnosed me with a yeast infection.

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But at the time, I didn't know I was being misdiagnosed. So I thought, "Huh that sounds a little weird. We're not going to do any imaging considering my history," but I thought, you know, "These people know my history." They told me to take some Monistat or Diflucan which, you know, gets rid of the fungal infection. And that didn't work. So I went back a couple other times. And they still said, "Yeah. It's still a yeast infection. It's still a yeast infection." And that was over the course of, like, nine months.

So I was still having pains. It wasn't going away. And the first time I had cancer, I didn't really have pains like this. It felt, like-- It was just, like, daily pain. I just went to my doctor, the one who had moved his practice to Denver. So I went there. And they found-- On the first time that they saw me, they found a very large tumor. It's the same kind of tumor, germ cell tumor, which is a type of ovarian cancer.

**Shohreh:** That must have been so frustrating for you to go back so many times to this doctor and keep hearing that it's an infection that is not clearing up. I mean, towards the end of that, were you feeling frustrated, feeling like they were getting it wrong?

**Maegan:** Oh, yes. Totally, I felt that. And it was just so frustrating because of the first surgery that I had. I was really in tune with my body, and I just kept thinking, "That is not what it is. I know that's not what it is. I know that something's growing in there that should not be in there" because, you know, you can just feel the tumor growing. It's kind of weird.

So I knew that that's not what was going on. And I was very frustrated. And I did say something. Like, "This pain's not going away with this medication." My infection wasn't clearing up. They didn't do any kind of imaging, and that was very, very frustrating.

And I was very frustrated with myself because I had considered myself a really good self-advocate in the medical field because of my experience in 2015, but I still just trusted the words of the doctors, you know? And thought, "They know what's best" even though, intuitively, I knew what was going on.

But I kind of just let it go. And I really wish that I hadn't done that because then, if I had gotten to the tumor earlier, it would have been taken out in surgery, it would have been a lot smaller, a lot easier to deal with and a lot less painful.

**Shohreh:** And, unfortunately, it is so common for women and marginalized people in particular to be misdiagnosed, to have their pain not believed or minimized by doctors. And I don't think that this is necessarily, like, a conscious thing that doctors are doing. I think it's under the surface. But I've just read so many stories and heard from so many people about their lived experiences with this.

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And it just is really frustrating because, obviously, this, as you mentioned, had real effects in your life as far as how this cancer was being treated. And, obviously, it can lead to death for some people too. It's really messed up.

**Maegan:** Right, exactly. Now, I can advocate a little bit better for myself. But when you're doing surgery and you're under these painkillers, it's really, really difficult to be able to advocate for yourself because you're in somebody else's hands. And they really let me down. It was a woman. I had a woman doctor to continue misdiagnosing me, I think two or three times, without doing any kind of imaging.

So that was really frustrating. And you're right, I could have caught it a lot earlier, and I wouldn't have had to go through so many months of chemo and this whole cancer process.

**Shohreh:** So where are you at right now in the treatment process? Have you had surgery and now you're doing chemo?

**Maegan:** Yes. So I had surgery the day that I went in. So I went in first, and they said, "Yeah. We think there's a tumor here, but it could be a fibroid" which is what they thought was my last one was. So that's what I said. I said, "You told me that last time."

[laughter]

**Maegan:** And they said, "Well, yes." And so I'm pretty sure that they knew that it was a tumor, but I know that they had to do tests to make sure that that's what it was, to validate that. And I had a follow-up appointment the next week. And the day of my appointment, I just went in. And they said, "We want to admit you for surgery. We have to get this tumor out. We've got to do surgery tomorrow morning."

And surgery included having a total hysterectomy. In 2015, I only had my left ovary removed, and this time I had my right ovary removed, my uterus, cervix, everything because the cancer was very-- high likelihood of it metastasizing.

So they decided to do the surgery right away. They admitted me to the hospital right after I left the doctor's office. And I only had less than 12 hours to come to terms with the fact that I would never be able to have a child. And that's something that I had been struggling with a lot, was thinking about having children. Did I want to have children? Babies crying makes me murderous.

**Shohreh:** Me too.

**Maegan:** Oh my gosh. Especially on planes.

**Shohreh:** [laughs]

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**Maegan:** And so that's something that I had been thinking about. But this time, there was really no choice. It would save my life. So I could continue to keep my uterus and one of my ovaries, but that would really, really jeopardize my health, so I decided not to do that. And I said, you know, "Just take it all."

**Shohreh:** I can only imagine what that must have felt like for you, basically having that decision made for you because it's not like you necessarily had decided that you wanted to have kids, but having that option is something that's within your own power. And then, without having any time to really think about it, basically being told, "All right, well, do you want to save your life? Like, this is what we have to do." What a whirlwind those twelve hours must have been for you.

**Maegan:** Yeah. It was really insane. And there were people driving in. Like, my mom drove in from Texas to stay with me and to be there during the surgery. And my partner, Malcolm, he, you know, has a job here. So he had to go and still work. So I was alone in the hospital that night. And that was actually really, really scary.

I had to tell people. That was a weird process, telling people, because if you call them, you know-- I'm not really much of a phone person. I'm more of a text person. So when I called all of my friends, they were like, "Oh my God. What happened? What's up? Are you dying?"

So it was just a weird process. It's a weird process to have to try to understand or come to terms with-- that I might die on the table. We didn't know really what it looked like. We didn't know if it had metastasized.

It did wrap itself around one of my kidneys, so I only had kidney function in one of my kidneys. The other one functions at like four percent, and then the other one functions at like 98 percent. So they were possibly gonna have to take a kidney.

They knew that the tumor had wrapped in some of my arteries, especially around my femoral artery of my left leg which is where the pain was coming from, all that pain that I had.

And so I had to come to terms with that as I was sitting in the hospital alone. And it was a new hospital. It was staff I had never met before. So it was just a very real experience having to come to terms with that.

**Shohreh:** I'm overwhelmed. That sounds so tough. And I can only imagine what that was like for you. You made it through the surgery. You're here. You did not die on the table. We are very grateful for that.

**Maegan:** Did not die on the table. Very grateful for that. So my prognosis, once I got out of surgery, was that I was going to have to do chemo and then do another surgery because it turns out they couldn't take out my tumor because it had wrapped itself around those femoral arteries.

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And they thought that they were going to be able to deal with that, but it was just too entwined. And I could have possibly lost my left leg. And this is something that they're telling me as I'm coming out of my very, very deep coma, basically, that I was in from the painkillers and the anesthesia.

And it's very hard to make sense of what somebody is saying when they're saying all of this to you. And my mom was there. And she was trying to explain it to me because I was very confused. And of course, she was emotional in dealing with her own emotions. So she just kind of told me what they said in pieces.

I think for a long time-- I thought I was gonna die. And I don't even remember this conversation that I had had with my mom. But I was carrying around this weight of death. So it was really difficult for me to be optimistic, be happy, to laugh, to want to do anything, to take my medicine even because, you know, I thought I was going to die. I really did.

**Shohreh:** Wow. That is tough, just having that feeling inside of you like, "Okay. Like, this is it." I mean, I know that your prognosis has since changed. Can you talk about where you're at now?

**Maegan:** Yes. My prognosis has changed. So when we did chemo, we did two rounds of chemo. And we did a test after that, and the CT showed that my tumor had shrunk to a third of its original size. It started out at 12 centimeters, and then it went to four centimeters.

So the chemo was very, very effective which my doctor had hoped that it would be because the tumor is "chemo-naïve" I think is what they called it. So it hadn't ever being exposed to chemo before. And so just two rounds of it made it decrease in size by a third.

And I could feel it. I didn't have pain anymore. I still don't have the pain that I was experiencing. So because it shrunk so much, my doctor said that we could potentially not have to do surgery again and just do a few more rounds of chemo.

So my prognosis was definitely shortened. And that was just a weight lifted off of my shoulders. And around that time, I had talked to my partner, Malcolm, about what it was like when I just came out of surgery. And he was the one that told me about the conversation that I had with my mom when she was experiencing it and processing it.

And so she wasn't really thinking rationally, you know? She had trauma-brain. And she didn't really give me a very good explanation, which totally makes sense for the position that we were in. But I was carrying that around for a very long time, and I didn't even know it.

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**Shohreh:** When it switched from really thinking like, "I'm going to die" to getting this new prognosis, how did that feel for you?

**Maegan:** It was weird. This whole process has been so quick. That whole beginning process was so quick that it was so surreal that that was happening and that chemo worked that well.

And I sort of started feeling like, "Why was I complaining so much," you know? Because I had shared a lot about my experience on my blog and on my Instagram. And it made me feel like I didn't deserve to be complaining about it, or I don't deserve to be on short-term disability and not working because, you know, I don't have it as bad as other people do who are going through chemo, and radiation, and all that kind of treatment. I never had to have radiation, and radiation is just horrible. And sometimes, they make you do it with chemo.

So the people that-- I would go into my doctor's office, and I would look around and start talking to some of these people. And their prognoses were just so dreadful. And I felt guilty, kind of like survivor's guilt, almost.

**Shohreh:** It's so interesting because something you and I have talked about is imposter syndrome and how that shows up. And it's a very common experience for women and marginalized people to have imposter syndrome. And I know you mentioned even having it about coming on the show today and sharing your experiences.

But you as a person with cancer, you were experiencing imposter syndrome about your cancer not being bad enough to talk about it. Like, that is some deep-seated imposter syndrome, which I think so many of us go through.

**Maegan:** Totally. And it's so funny to hear you say that out loud. [laughs] But yeah. That's really what I was feeling: survivor's guilt and imposter. Like, I don't belong in the cancer survivor's community. And that's definitely something I felt from the first time.

People would say that I was a survivor, that I'm strong, that kind of stuff, I kicked cancer's ass or whatever. And I thought, "Not really." I just had surgery. I just laid there, and my doctor took it out, and then stitched me up, and I recovered. And then I was fine.

So I guess I'm still feeling a little bit of that residual imposter syndrome. Well, I mean, I have it all the time, obviously. I was scared. Well, not scared. I just had the imposter syndrome coming on to talk about cancer. I thought, "Well, who am I? I'm not an expert." [laughs]

**Shohreh:** Right. And I don't care if you're not an expert. You're here to share your lived experiences and what you're going through. I know it's so hard to struggle with that because it's in your own head.

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I mean, I've had imposter syndrome about all kinds of things, about, "Am I gay enough to be bi and queer?"

**Maegan:** Oh my gosh.

**Shohreh:** You know? I'm mixed race. And so I'm like, "Oh. Am I white enough? Am I Persian enough?" Like, this whole, like, being caught in between things, I think it's so common to have that come up in different spaces. So it's just interesting me to hear that in the cancer space as well.

And also, you mentioned about language. And I actually wanted to ask you about this. Like, how do you feel about the way people tend to describe cancer? Like, saying things like, "It's a battle." And, like, all the emphasis on, "You're so strong." As someone with cancer, like, do you absolutely hate that? Like, does any of that resonate with you?

**Maegan:** Oh. It's total bullshit. It makes me roll my eyes. And there are a lot of other people that I follow on Instagram or social media who really buy into that, like, "Strong. Survivor." And they buy a lot of that merchandise that have the whatever color ribbon that their cancer is.

And they really dig into to that. And if that works with them, that's wonderful. But that doesn't work for me. It feels very disingenuous. And I appreciate people's support, and I do need to be reminded that I'm strong. But it just feels weird to me because it's just like-- I'm just sitting on my couch. How am I being strong, you know?

**Shohreh:** Not only that, but I think, for me, what was always weird about it was we say, like, "She lost her battle with cancer." And I'm like, "That implication is that it was your fault, almost." You know what I mean?

**Maegan:** Yes.

**Shohreh:** Like that you didn't fight hard enough. And I hate that because that's not true. Like, obviously, like, cancer fucking sucks. You can't help if you get cancer. There's a million different factors involved. And, like, some people survive, and some people don't. It's no one's fault because they didn't fight it off hard enough.

**Maegan:** Right, exactly. And there was a CNN article I read that actually you had posted about right after I read it which was so wonderful because it gave me the perfect reframe.

But when I read it, it said something like, "Millennials are getting cancer, and it's their fault," basically. And it was just this bullshit article. Bullshit article. It made me feel so guilty. And I couldn't even read the whole thing. It just immediately made me cry and made me feel like my ovarian cancer was my fault which-- I asked my doctor that because I was so worried about it being my fault. And he said that there was no way.

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I mean, it's a very rare form of tumor and that diet and exercise or lifestyle habits or whatever, they just didn't contribute to this cancer. So that was nice to hear that.

**Shohreh:** And I think that article in particular, if I recall, one of the reasons that it stuck out to me was because the headline was pretty outrageous. It basically suggested that people who are- quote, unquote- obese have higher likelihoods of cancer.

And I was like, "Wow. That is a strong claim to make" which is why I went to the article. I looked up the actual studies the article was referencing, and that is not what those studies said at all which is why I posted about it because I was like, "Here is an example of a headline that is just scaremongering, is going to make people freak out and be guilty," just like it did for you, "and in reality, the studies didn't say that at all." The studies can't prove causation. The authors were just suggesting what they thought might be the cause of these higher incidences of cancer.

And, of course, we live in a society with a lot of weight-stigma. So if you're an author of a study, and you are affected by weight-stigma and fatphobia, you are much more likely to put up that potential option as, "Oh. This could be the reason why this is." And then of course, the article takes the headline out of it to get more clicks.

So it sucks that that kind of stuff is out there because you're a perfect case of someone who read it and was like, "Oh my God. Is my cancer my own fault?" And you should never, ever have to think that.

**Maegan:** Right, exactly. And I am a person who is in a larger body, and, of course, that's a very sensitive subject and something that I haven't talked about for a long time because it's shameful. There's so much shame just surrounded by it. I come from a family of people in large bodies who have faced a lot of adversity because of that in public all through their lives. And that's kind of how I feel as well.

So reading that article kind of cemented it for me. And I thought, "Oh my god. My worst fears are true." It was like, "Why--" It made me feel very depressed. And then I saw your post about it. And I read it, and I thought, "Oh my God. I am so happy for this reframe because I really would have carried that around for a long time."

**Shohreh:** I'm glad that that was just like a right time, right moment type situation of you having read that article, me also having read it and deciding that I cared enough about it to post about it and then you getting to see that because it's just really nice when my work works out that way.

But you mentioned that you are someone who's in a larger body. Your family has a lot of people in larger bodies. I'm curious, how has cancer changed the way you feel about your body and your body image in general, if it has?

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**Maegan:** Well, before I was diagnosed, I had bought the intuitive eating workbook by-- I can't remember who it's by, but it's amazing. So I had just started my journey in accepting my body for what it is. And I've been on that journey for a long time, but intuitive eating really solidified that for me. It just gave me another way to look at something that I had been, and everybody that I knew, society, has been looking at this issue in a completely wrong way.

And intuitive eating was so freeing for me. And it really did all the things that it said it would. If I don't want a cookie, I don't want a cookie. If I want a cookie, I want a cookie. And that's really helped me eat more quality food because I'm not, you know-- Like, I would go to a work meeting, and they would have those stale Walmart cookies.

**Shohreh:** Ugh, gross.

**Maegan:** I had these preconceived notions about how many cookies you're allowed to grab or how many-- If you take three, then people are going to look at you and think you shouldn't have three cookies, but if you take two, you can slide under the radar.

[laughter]

**Maegan:** So I was really excited on this journey. It was very freeing. And I just had gotten to the point where I did not give a fuck. Like, I did not care that I was in a larger body. And I could love myself. And it just totally reframed the diet-culture that we have and just had given me answers to questions I've had my whole life. And it was very freeing.

But then, I get diagnosed with cancer. And because the natural course of having surgery, and then having to be on a liquid diet, and then having chemo, is rapid weight loss. So my body is very different now than it was just three months ago. So I have lost a lot of weight which is something, actually, that a nutritionist told me that I should do. So my doctor recommended that I consult with a nutritionist. And he was very traditional, diet-culture, BMI, talking about lowering the number of calories or intake or whatever.

**Shohreh:** He was super weight-centric.

**Maegan:** Super weight-centric. So he put me on a vegan diet and a no-sugar diet, and told me to get my BMI down, lose some of the weight. And of course, you know, he was very kind about it. But I could have scratched his eyes out.

**Shohreh:** For sure.

**Maegan:** I was thinking like, "No. intuitive eating tells me that that's bullshit."

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**Shohreh:** That must have been really tough, especially-- you were kind of knew on your intuitive eating journey, had finally found this thing that works for you, only to have this experience with cancer, going to a nutritionist about that specifically, and having someone tell you, "Nope. We're going to do, not just a diet, but, like, one of the most restrictive possible diets ever. Oh. And also, we need you to focus on weight loss."

**Maegan:** Exactly. And they told me this the day after my surgery. So yeah, "Focus on weight loss." I'm like, "Listen, bro. I still feel like my entrails, my intestines, are just going to fall out of me right now. Like, I'm sorry I'm not going to be doing push-ups right now." So it just felt very invalidating when I met with him and he said those things.

And then I read the report of what the "post-patient seeing report" or whatever that's called. And the report said that-- it classified me as an overweight female, an "unfortunate overweight female" I think were the exact words.

**Shohreh:** Wow.

**Maegan:** And I thought, "Oh my God. Oh my God. That is so offensive." But that's really what diet culture perpetuates. And he is somebody who is maybe not in the intuitive eating camp. And it definitely showed. But having that base in intuitive eating and knowing that there is another way to look at things, of having that reframe for my entire life basically, that was really helpful, and it made me feel a lot better. It was, like, balm to my poor, wounded heart.

**Shohreh:** So did you end up taking his dietary advice?

**Maegan:** This is a really good question. So right after he told me about that, I was angry. And my poor mom, she doesn't know what vegan is. So she was telling me things, like, "Oh, wel" to try to comfort me, "You can still have chicken."

**Shohreh:** [laughs]

**Maegan:** I was like, "No. No I can't." And she was like, "Oh. Well, you can still have yogurt." "No, Mom. I cannot have yogurt." So she was really trying.

And I was just so angry because I was like, "I didn't sign up for this." But he basically made me feel like if I don't follow this diet that my cancer is going to kill me. And so I was just so angry, and I didn't want to do it.

And when I came home, I couldn't eat anything. I was nauseated. And there were other people that told me because of the chemo and because of surgery, you know, "You're going to feel nauseated, so eat whatever you can. Eat whatever you want. Just get protein in."

But this guy said, you know, I had to cut out all sugar. And I could only eat, like, fruits that are really dark, like blackberries or blueberries,

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because the other fruits have too much sugar and not enough nutrients.

**Shohreh:** Oh my God. I hate this guy.

**Maegan:** [laughs]

**Shohreh:** Sorry if that's offensive. I hate him.

**Maegan:** I know. And you know what? This works for him. He has had cancer for 10 years. And he has been living with it- and he's never had chemo, radiation, any of that- by doing this vegan diet and taking all these supplements that he prescribed to me, you know? That's wonderful if it works for him, but I don't think he understands how shitty he's making his patients feel.

**Shohreh:** Absolutely. Because, first of all, not everybody is going to be able to do that kind of a restrictive diet. And obviously, this is a little bit of a different situation from your typical diet because the purpose of this diet was for medical reasons.

Now also, he wanted you to lose weight, but putting that aside, obviously, sometimes medically supervised diets are necessary. But a diet that restrictive, most people, even people with cancer, are not going to be able to keep up with it, are just going to just feel guilt and shame like you do with any diet for not being able to stay, you know- quote, unquote- on the plan. A lot of times, I think it's adding more harm than good.

And not only that, obviously, I'm not an RD, but my reading about diets and cancer is that we're just in the very early stages of knowing what can help, and that it's very different with different cancers as well.

So anytime someone is being really dogmatic about that or just very black and white like, "Here is *the* cancer diet, and you have to be on this." Like, that rings alarm bells for me because my understanding of the science is that, like, we don't have anything that black and white yet when it comes to cancer and nutrition.

**Maegan:** Yes, exactly. And I think he was preaching from what works for him which is wonderful. And I think that that could work for a lot of people. But telling me that I can't have any sugar and because sugar feeds the tumor-- Oh my gosh. But any time I had any kind of sugar right after that, I felt so guilty. I felt like I was killing myself.

**Shohreh:** Which is absolutely horrible to give any kind of suggestion like that to a cancer patient of like, "Oh. The future of your life is in your hands based on what you eat and you do not eat." Like, that's fucked up.

**Maegan:** Yes. It's so fucked up. And, of course, that's all I want. And there's so much sugar in everything, and because you told me no, that's all I

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wanted. And then I would eat, and then there was this whole cycle that I've had my whole life before intuitive eating, and I didn't want to get back into that. So I decided that what I was going to do was I was going to either, well, try to do one or two of these three things each day. So I could have no sugar, or I could have no dairy, or I could have no meat. So if I did two out of three per day, then I felt like I was doing pretty good.

**Shohreh:** And I think that makes a lot of sense. Again, given the context of all of this, you're being told by a medical professional, like, "Here's the diet that we recommend for your cancer." You're realizing on your end that this is so far from the intuitive eating that you've come to love, but you've been able to strike a balance in between. And I think that's really all that you can do. And it's so much up to the individual. And you've decided like, "Here. This is the thing that works right for me."

**Maegan:** Yes, exactly.

**Shohreh:** So I noticed on your blog that you talked about seeing things through the lens of cancer. Can you talk about that and what that means?

**Maegan:** Sure. So I wrote a post on my blog about the cancer lens. And right after I got diagnosed, it felt like every decision that I made, every piece of food that I ate, every decision about, well, "Should I make plans six months from now? Am I going to be dead?" Everything that I did, thought about, planned, revolved around cancer. And that felt kind of like an assault on me because it was just non-stop.

And that's all I could see was-- I could barely see the thing that I was trying to see because of this cancer lens. And it was just a part of everything that I thought about, saw, you know? It was just all-encompassing.

**Shohreh:** Especially because, at first, I know that you were really thinking that the prognosis was pretty poor. And so you can't help but run your life through that filter. But I'm curious, looking on maybe a little more positive side of things, are there any silver linings that you've noticed to cancer, or is it all 100 percent the worst?

**Maegan:** Oh my gosh. There are so many silver linings. I like that it has forced me to slow down and really, really get to know my body which I was trying to do through intuitive eating before that. But now, I'm very familiar with my body.

And I think if I grow a tumor again which, of course, because I've had recurrent ovarian cancer, it's like way more likely that I'm gonna get it again. But if I do, I think I'm going to catch it earlier because I know my body. And I really have been paying attention to that.

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And it's been nice to have time off to where I can journal and reflect. And I think a lot of the issues that I had was I was wondering "why" for so long. I think that's a common thing.

And I didn't want to feel sorry for myself, but it's hard not to feel sorry for yourself when you don't have hair and, you know, I can't walk across from one room to another without having to stop to take a breath some days, and I can't eat. There are some days where I just throw up all day.

Because of having to slow down like that, I am very grateful for this time and this experience. I think I am learning things that I didn't learn the first time around which, you know, I think is the universe just putting it in front of me again like, "You didn't learn this lesson, so here it is again. So learn these lessons."

And I really feel like I have a better relationship with myself and a better relationship with the people around me. There were so many people who stepped up. There was a person that I worked with who brought me meals for an entire week.

And then, people were just showering me with support and love. And that's been amazing. And it's come from places that I didn't even expect that it would. So it's really, really seeing what my support net looks like in Colorado Springs because, of course, I'm not a native. So it's kind of hard. It's hard to be in a new place and get sick.

And, you know, my mom wanted me to come home to Texas. And she wanted me to come home so she could care for me. And I just thought, "No. This is my home now, and this experience has really solidified that," you know? "These are my doctors. These are my neighbors and my community." My community has really responded to help me.

**Shohreh:** It sounds like with this experience of having cancer, especially a second time, like, in some ways, it's really helped you define yourself even more. And of course, while we have been talking a lot about cancer, cancer is not the only thing that defines you. What else would you say defines you and your life outside of this cancer? Because I want to make sure that people know that you are a whole person, and you just happen to have cancer.

**Maegan:** Oh. I appreciate that so much because, sometimes, when I see people in public, they're like, "How are you? How are you?" I'm sick of telling people how I am. It's nice that they care, but it's like, "Please."

**Shohreh:** Yeah. You just want to be treated like a normal person.

**Maegan:** I just want to be treated like a normal person. So I define myself as a person in the LGBT queer community. I do a lot of advocacy in that community. I worked at a non-profit with LGBT youth. And it was so awesome. What a great experience that that was. But then I had to kind

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of take a step back from that because, of course, my illness and all of that, but I can't wait to get back into advocating for the LGBT community because that is definitely where my passion lies.

**Shohreh:** That's amazing. That's so cool that you do that work. As someone who's also queer and in the community, like, I definitely want to get more involved with that myself.

**Maegan:** Oh, it was so amazing. And it was just really sad to see these youth because their parents-- They have no support. Their parents just set them free. They came out to their parents, and their parents were like, "All right. Peace out. We're not going to support you anymore. Don't call us." So it was just tragic to see, but it was so wonderful to work with them because the youth are so inspiring and so...also maddening at the same time.

**Shohreh:** [laughs] So true.

**Maegan:** So true. So I can't wait to get back into that once I heal and get back on my feet as they say.

**Shohreh:** I can imagine that, for those youth in particular, having adult role models who accept them as they are is, like, a really key part in their healing and functioning.

**Maegan:** Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I used to know the statistics that I could rattle off for you, but yes. The studies show that youth with a supportive adult, especially in the LGBT community, they really thrive a lot better, and there's less risk of suicide.

**Shohreh:** That makes a lot of sense. So I always ask the same wrap-up question, and I'm actually really excited to ask it to you given your current health situation. And that wrap-up question is how do you define health and wellness for yourself at this moment in your life?

**Maegan:** At this moment in my life. That is a great question. Health and wellness to me is really paying attention to my body, and really getting to know my body and knowing when it's giving me cues like "I'm hungry", or, you know, "I need to take a nap", or "I need to take a rest because I can't walk across this room."

So it's really helped me to kind of define who I am. Like you said, it's kind of more integrated. My whole cancer experience is more integrated into my identity now.

Health and wellness to me really, I think before this experience, I would think that that's mainly physical, but now I know that it's also spiritual. It's also emotional. It's also societal, you know? It's a lot. It encompasses everything, not just my physical being.

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**Shohreh:** And I love that that has become really clear to you that our health, even though people always think it's just the physical, like, there's so many more parts to it, especially when you're having poor physical health.

Like, all those other ones become even more important because, again, there's only so much you can do about your situation. But there are other aspects of your health that are still in your control and that you can focus on that can improve your overall well-being.

**Maegan:** Yes. Yes, exactly. And it taught me to let go of the things that I can't control because there, unfortunately, are a lot.

**Shohreh:** Yes, that is so true. Well, Maegan, thank you so much for being here today. I hope that any imposter syndrome that you had about sharing your story has dissipated because this has been such a wonderful conversation.

How can people find you?

**Maegan:** So you can find my blog at [maegoestwestblog.wordpress.com](http://maegoestwestblog.wordpress.com), or you can find me at Instagram - @maegoestwestblog. And I just recently got a new puppy, so come follow me for very cute puppy pictures and videos.

**Shohreh:** Mmm puppy pictures and videos is a very enticing offer. I think everyone clearly needs to go follow Maegan so they can see all of that.

**Maegan:** [laughs]

**Shohreh:** I will of course post those in the show notes so that people can find you very easily. Thank you again. This has been wonderful. And obviously, I'm sending you all the good vibes and everything that you need to get through this experience with cancer.

**Maegan:** Oh, thank you. It's been such a pleasure. Thank you so much.

**Shohreh:** You're welcome.

And that's our show for today. I appreciate you listening to and supporting the Redefining Health & Wellness podcast.

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And if you're looking for more information on what I'm all about and how to work with me, head on over to [shohrehdavoodi.com](http://shohrehdavoodi.com).

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Hope to see you for the next episode.