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## Eat to Beat Disease: The New Science of How Your Body Can Heal Itself

Dr. Birnholz:

Welcome to the ReachMD *Book Club*. I'm Dr. Matt Birnholz, and on today's program, we'll hear from Dr. William Li, President of the Angiogenesis Foundation, who shares highlights from his *New York Times*-bestselling book, *Eat to Beat Disease: The New Science of How Your Body Can Heal Itself*.

Here's Dr. Li now.

Dr. Li:

I wrote this book after 30 years of research and clinical practice because, although there are so many opportunities to use medical science to develop new, effective, and safe treatments for the diseases that we fear the most—cancer, heart disease, diabetes, dementia, obesity, the list goes on—there was really a remarkable opportunity to use the same science to be able to look at how foods affect your body and how our body responds as a result of actually being fed the food.

I'm an internal medicine doctor, a vascular biologist, and my interest has always been looking at common denominators of health and disease. I wrote *Eat to Beat Disease* really to help introduce the fact that when it comes to food and health, it's really not just about the food; it's really about how your body responds to what you put inside it. And the first thing that I write about in my book is that we are born with hardwired health defense systems from the time we're born to our very last breath. There are 5 health defense systems: angiogenesis, our stem cells, our microbiome, the ability for your DNA to be able to repair itself and slow down aging, and our immune system. These 5 systems are hardwired, and they respond to our diet. In other words, what we eat can actually take down these defenses that prevent us from getting sick more often, or they can actually amplify them. And what I do in my first part is talk about how each of these systems have been discovered by medical scientists, how they are relevant to health and disease, and in some cases how the biotech industry has been developing new treatments that are based on these health defenses. Now, obviously, treatments are based on diseases, and one of the interesting things is can we actually use the same information in order to be able to prevent disease, not using drugs but using food.

In part 2 of my book, I actually talk about the foods that can amplify and activate each of these health defenses. I talk about foods that can actually starve cancer by cutting off its blood supply, and this is foods that actually control angiogenesis, so there are a whole list of foods that have been discovered that can prevent cancers from growing blood vessels to feed themselves. On the other hand, I also write about the way foods have been discovered to stimulate or coax blood vessels to grow out to feed healthy tissues and organs. I also talk about foods that can stimulate regeneration, and this was remarkable as I was writing the book to discover that in fact there were a large number of foods that can target our stem cells. In other words, rather than have to inject the stem cell, you can coax them out of your own body, and they can build your circulation and help to repair organs. There's also a section I write about where foods can actually target cancer stem cells. Cancer stem cells are really the bane of an oncologist's existence and really the problem for cancer patients because even after successful treatment, the recurrence of a cancer is often most likely due to the cancer stem cells that are actually recrudescing and growing back again.

I talk about in another chapter foods that impact the microbiome, healthy gut bacteria in our body that control our immune system, control brain hormone secretion, control metabolism, and how foods can actually either damage our microbiome very quickly, in as quickly as 24 hours in some cases, or foods that can help support our microbiome, either as prebiotics that are intended to feed our healthy gut bacteria or probiotics that introduce healthy gut bacteria themselves. I also talk about dietary patterns, like the Mediterranean diet, for example, that help to coax and groom the healthy ecosystem of our bacteria.

In another chapter I talk about foods that actually impact our DNA. So, our DNA is much more than our genetic code. It's a system that protects us against the environment. For example, ultraviolet radiation damages our DNA, toxins that we may inhale or ingest also impact our DNA, and aging itself actually damages our DNA, so I talk about the foods that help our DNA repair itself against this kind of damage and slow down cellular aging. In fact, there are some foods that help us not just slow aging but reverse cellular aging by increasing the length of the protective telomeres in our body.

Finally, I talk about how do you activate your immune system using food, because we've gone far beyond grandma's chicken soup to really understanding how certain micronutrients support immunity, and there are now clinical studies that have shown foods that can actually boost immunity itself using measurable markers like our T-cells, our natural killer cells, our beta cells, and also our immunoglobulins, and so there are a number of foods that can do that. And I take it further to try to separate immune-boosting from inflammation because there are foods that actually improve our cellular immunity but also decrease an inflammatory response, for example, such as we see in autoimmune diseases like lupus or rheumatoid arthritis.

And in the last part of my book, I put all this together into a really practical plan that everyone can use for themselves, whether it's a clinician trying to look at how they can optimize their own diet or a patient that you're trying to advise or a family member or a dietitian that they're trying to tailor a healthy diet to an individual's particular situation, whether they are healthy or they're dealing with an illness. What I've done is try to make it easy for people to follow, and I call my plan the 5 x 5 x 5 framework, and simply put, it basically means we've got 5 health defense systems in the body, and what we should do every single day is eat at least 1 food that helps to support each of those health defenses. And typically, we tend to have 5 encounters with food every day, so think about breakfast, lunch, dinner, and a couple of snacks or a dessert. Those are all the 5 timelines that we can use to introduce an immune or microbiome or stem cell or vascular or DNA-activating food into our system, and that's really how you eat to beat disease.

I have lists and tables of more than 200 foods, and I've emphasized that my approach to healthy eating is not about fear, guilt or shame, it's not about elimination—although I do talk about foods that are not healthy for you that can destroy or damage your health defenses—but my emphasis on what foods you should lean into and add, and my adage is really “love your food to love your health,” and so from more than 200 foods you can select. You can always find something that you relate to, whether it's from your childhood, your family, your culture. We all come from someplace. We all resonate with certain foods. And the great news is that many of the foods that we love happen to be health defense activating.

Obviously, a book is written by drafting a manuscript and sending it in, and then the book is published, and yet the research continues, and so I actually tell my readers, if you want to, get my book and read it, but if you want to find out the latest information that's come up, please visit my website at [DrWilliamLi.com](http://DrWilliamLi.com)—that's D-R William Li, L-I, .com, and come find out what's new, what are immune-supporting foods in the COVID era. Find out what we should be doing when we are able to get fresh food, and we have to make these decisions on what to feed not only ourselves but our children. Come and find out what we need to think about to be able to protect our healthy blood vessels as we're beginning to understand further the enigma of COVID and understanding the role of the blood vessels, and also think about, as we get into different parts of the year and we get into celebrations that we can have with our own family or with guests, how do we make the healthiest choices we can year round so that we can eat to beat disease.

Dr. Birnholz:

That was Dr. William Li discussing his book, *Eat to Beat Disease: The New Science of How Your Body Can Heal Itself*. To revisit any part of this program or to find others in this series, visit [ReachMD.com-slash-Book-Club](http://ReachMD.com-slash-Book-Club), where you can be part of the knowledge. Thanks for listening!

